

# Collected Lyrics

of

Edna St. Vincent Millay

HARPER & BROTHERS ESTABLISHED 1817


# COLLECTED LYRICS

of Edna St. Vincent Millay

These two-hundred-odd lyrics, some of considerable length, have been selected by Miss Millay from her published poems. Arranged chronologically they follow the order of their original publication from *Renascence* to *Huntsman, What Quarry?*

Miss Millay's poetry has been acclaimed for its lyrical perfection, and its creator as one of America's foremost poets. Robert P. Tristram Coffin wrote, "Going among her lyrics is like going into the woods before the leaves are completely out, going among the delicate tracery of shadows. . . . Every breath is tuned, every line is true, every curve seems right." Elinor Wylie, in whose memory Miss Millay wrote some of the loveliest lyrics in *Huntsman, What Quarry?* said of her, "She is like nothing at all but herself: when she and this generation are gone, the die which stamped her style will be broken." And Carl Van Doren wrote of *Renascence*, "One of the loveliest of American poems. If it has the movement of a bird's flight, it has the ease of a bird's song."

These lyrics, collected for the first time, are presented in a volume designed as a companion to Miss Millay's *Collected Sonnets*.



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COLLECTED LYRICS

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*Books by*

Edna St. Vincent Millay



THE BUCK IN THE SNOW

SECOND APRIL

THREE PLAYS

RENASCENCE

A FEW FIGS FROM THISTLES

THE HARP-WEAVER

ARIA DA CAPO

THE KING'S HENCHMAN

THE LAMP AND THE BELL

THE PRINCESS MARRIES THE PAGE

POEMS SELECTED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

FATAL INTERVIEW

WINE FROM THESE GRAPES

CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT

HUNTSMAN, WHAT QUARRY?

MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS

COLLECTED SONNETS

COLLECTED LYRICS



*Harper & Brothers*

*Publishers*

# Collected Lyrics

of

Edna St. Vincent Millay



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## COLLECTED LYRICS

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From *RENAISSANCE*

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### *Renascence*

All I could see from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood;  
I turned and looked another way,  
And saw three islands in a bay.  
So with my eyes I traced the line  
Of the horizon, thin and fine,  
Straight around till I was come  
Back to where I'd started from;  
And all I saw from where I stood  
Was three long mountains and a wood.

Over these things I could not see:  
These were the things that bounded me.  
And I could touch them with my hand,  
Almost, I thought, from where I stand!  
And all at once things seemed so small  
My breath came short, and scarce at all.

But, sure, the sky is big, I said:  
Miles and miles above my head.  
So here upon my back I'll lie  
And look my fill into the sky.  
And so I looked, and after all,  
The sky was not so very tall.  
The sky, I said, must somewhere stop . . .  
And—sure enough!—I see the top!  
The sky, I thought, is not so grand;  
I 'most could touch it with my hand!  
And reaching up my hand to try,  
I screamed, to feel it touch the sky.

I screamed, and—lo!—Infinity  
Came down and settled over me;  
Forced back my scream into my chest;  
Bent back my arm upon my breast;  
And, pressing of the Undefined  
The definition on my mind,  
Held up before my eyes a glass  
Through which my shrinking sight did pass

Until it seemed I must behold  
Immensity made manifold;  
Whispered to me a word whose sound  
Deafened the air for worlds around,  
And brought unmuffled to my ears  
The gossiping of friendly spheres,  
The creaking of the tented sky,  
The ticking of Eternity.

I saw and heard, and knew at last  
The How and Why of all things, past,  
And present, and forevermore.  
The Universe, cleft to the core,  
Lay open to my probing sense,  
That, sickening, I would fain pluck thence  
But could not,—nay! but needs must suck  
At the great wound, and could not pluck  
My lips away till I had drawn  
All venom out.—Ah, fearful pawn:  
For my omniscience paid I toll  
In infinite remorse of soul.

All sin was of my sinning, all  
Atoning mine, and mine the gall  
Of all regret. Mine was the weight  
Of every brooded wrong, the hate  
That stood behind each envious thrust,  
Mine every greed, mine every lust.

And all the while, for every grief,  
Each suffering, I craved relief  
With individual desire;  
Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire  
About a thousand people crawl;  
Perished with each,—then mourned for all!

A man was starving in Capri;  
He moved his eyes and looked at me;  
I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,  
And knew his hunger as my own.

I saw at sea a great fog bank  
Between two ships that struck and sank;  
A thousand screams the heavens smote;  
And every scream tore through my throat.

No hurt I did not feel, no death  
That was not mine; mine each last breath  
That, crying, met an answering cry  
From the compassion that was I.  
All suffering mine, and mine its rod;  
Mine, pity like the pity of God.

Ah, awful weight! Infinity  
Pressed down upon the finite Me!  
My anguished spirit, like a bird,  
Beating against my lips I heard;  
Yet lay the weight so close about  
There was no room for it without.  
And so beneath the weight lay I  
And suffered death, but could not die.

Long had I lain thus, craving death,  
When quietly the earth beneath  
Gave way, and inch by inch, so great  
At last had grown the crushing weight,  
Into the earth I sank till I  
Full six feet under ground did lie,  
And sank no more,—there is no weight  
Can follow here, however great.  
From off my breast I felt it roll,  
And as it went my tortured soul  
Burst forth and fled in such a gust  
That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now.  
Cool is its hand upon the brow  
And soft its breast beneath the head  
Of one who is so gladly dead.  
And all at once, and over all  
The pitying rain began to fall;  
I lay and heard each pattering hoof  
Upon my lowly, thatched roof,

And seemed to love the sound far more  
Than ever I had done before.  
For rain it hath a friendly sound  
To one who's six feet under ground;  
And scarce the friendly voice or face,  
A grave is such a quiet place.

The rain, I said, is kind to come  
And speak to me in my new home.  
I would I were alive again  
To kiss the fingers of the rain,  
To drink into my eyes the shine  
Of every slanting silver line,  
To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze  
From drenched and dripping apple-trees.  
For soon the shower will be done,  
And then the broad face of the sun  
Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth  
Until the world with answering mirth  
Shakes joyously, and each round drop  
Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.

How can I bear it, buried here,  
While overhead the sky grows clear  
And blue again after the storm?  
O, multi-colored, multi-form,  
Belovèd beauty over me,  
That I shall never, never see  
Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold,  
That I shall never more behold!—  
Sleeping your myriad magics through,  
Close-sepulchred away from you!  
O God, I cried, give me new birth,  
And put me back upon the earth!  
Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd  
And let the heavy rain, down-poured  
In one big torrent, set me free,  
Washing my grave away from me!

I ceased; and through the breathless hush  
That answered me, the far-off rush  
Of herald wings came whispering  
Like music down the vibrant string  
Of my ascending prayer, and—crash!  
Before the wild wind's whistling lash

The startled storm-clouds reared on high  
And plunged in terror down the sky!  
And the big rain in one black wave  
Fell from the sky and struck my grave.

I know not how such things can be;  
I only know there came to me  
A fragrance such as never clings  
To aught save happy living things;  
A sound as of some joyous elf  
Singing sweet songs to please himself,  
And, through and over everything,  
A sense of glad awakening.  
The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear,  
Whispering to me I could hear;  
I felt the rain's cool finger-tips  
Brushed tenderly across my lips,  
Laid gently on my sealed sight,  
And all at once the heavy night  
Fell from my eyes and I could see!—  
A drenched and dripping apple-tree,  
A last long line of silver rain,

A sky grown clear and blue again.  
And as I looked a quickening gust  
Of wind blew up to me and thrust  
Into my face a miracle  
Of orchard-breath, and with the smell,—  
I know not how such things can be!—  
I breathed my soul back into me.

Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I  
And hailed the earth with such a cry  
As is not heard save from a man  
Who has been dead, and lives again.  
About the trees my arms I wound;  
Like one gone mad I hugged the ground;  
I raised my quivering arms on high;  
I laughed and laughed into the sky;  
Till at my throat a strangling sob  
Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb  
Sent instant tears into my eyes:  
O God, I cried, no dark disguise  
Can e'er hereafter hide from me  
Thy radiant identity!

Thou canst not move across the grass  
But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,  
Nor speak, however silently,  
But my hushed voice will answer Thee.  
I know the path that tells Thy way  
Through the cool eve of every day;  
God, I can push the grass apart  
And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The world stands out on either side  
No wider than the heart is wide;  
Above the world is stretched the sky,—  
No higher than the soul is high.  
The heart can push the sea and land  
Farther away on either hand;  
The soul can split the sky in two,  
And let the face of God shine through.  
But East and West will pinch the heart  
That can not keep them pushed apart;  
And he whose soul is flat—the sky  
Will cave in on him by and by.

### *Interim*

The room is full of you!—As I came in  
And closed the door behind me, all at once  
A something in the air, intangible,  
Yet stiff with meaning, struck my senses sick!—

Sharp, unfamiliar odours have destroyed  
Each other room's dear personality.  
The heavy scent of damp, funeral flowers,—  
The very essence, hush-distilled, of Death—  
Has strangled that habitual breath of home  
Whose expiration leaves all houses dead;  
And wheresoe'er I look is hideous change.  
Save here. Here 'twas as if a weed-choked gate  
Had opened at my touch, and I had stepped  
Into some long-forgot, enchanted, strange,  
Sweet garden of a thousand years ago  
And suddenly thought, "I have been here before!"

You are not here. I know that you are gone,  
And will not ever enter here again.  
And yet it seems to me, if I should speak,

Your silent step must wake across the hall;  
If I should turn my head, that your sweet eyes  
Would kiss me from the door.—So short a time  
To teach my life its transposition to  
This difficult and unaccustomed key!—

The room is as you left it; your last touch—  
A thoughtless pressure, knowing not itself  
As saintly—hallows now each simple thing;  
Hallows and glorifies, and glows between  
The dust's grey fingers like a shielded light.

There is your book, just as you laid it down,  
Face to the table,—I cannot believe  
That you are gone!—Just then it seemed to me  
You must be here. I almost laughed to think  
How like reality the dream had been;  
Yet knew before I laughed, and so was still.  
That book, outspread, just as you laid it down!  
Perhaps you thought, "I wonder what comes next,  
And whether this or this will be the end";  
So rose, and left it, thinking to return.

Perhaps that chair, when you arose and passed  
Out of the room, rocked silently a while  
Ere it again was still. When you were gone  
Forever from the room, perhaps that chair,  
Stirred by your movement, rocked a little while,  
Silently, to and fro . . .

And here are the last words your fingers wrote,  
Scrawled in broad characters across a page  
In this brown book I gave you. Here your hand,  
Guiding your rapid pen, moved up and down.  
Here with a looping knot you crossed a "t,"  
And here another like it, just beyond  
These two eccentric "e's." You were so small,  
And wrote so brave a hand!

How strange it seems  
That of all words these are the words you chose!  
And yet a simple choice; you did not know  
You would not write again. If you had known—  
But then, it does not matter,—and indeed  
If you had known there was so little time  
You would have dropped your pen and come to me

And this page would be empty, and some phrase  
Other than this would hold my wonder now.  
Yet, since you could not know, and it befell  
That these are the last words your fingers wrote,  
There is a dignity some might not see  
In this, "I picked the first sweet-pea today."  
Today! Was there an opening bud beside it  
You left until tomorrow?—O my love,  
The things that withered,—and you came not back!  
That day you filled this circle of my arms  
That now is empty. (O my empty life!)  
That day—that day you picked the first sweet-pea,—  
And brought it in to show me! I recall  
With terrible distinctness how the smell  
Of your cool gardens drifted in with you.  
I know, you held it up for me to see  
And flushed because I looked not at the flower,  
But at your face; and when behind my look  
You saw such unmistakable intent  
You laughed and brushed your flower against my lips.  
(You were the fairest thing God ever made,  
I think.) And then your hands above my heart

Drew down its stem into a fastening,  
And while your head was bent I kissed your hair.  
I wonder if you knew. (Belovèd hands!  
Somehow I cannot seem to see them still.  
Somehow I cannot seem to see the dust  
In your bright hair.) What is the need of Heaven  
When earth can be so sweet?—If only God  
Had let us love,—and show the world the way!  
Strange cancellings must ink the eternal books  
When love-crossed-out will bring the answer right!

That first sweet-pea! I wonder where it is.  
It seems to me I laid it down somewhere,  
And yet,—I am not sure. I am not sure,  
Even, if it was white or pink; for then  
'Twas much like any other flower to me,  
Save that it was the first. I did not know,  
Then, that it was the last. If I had known—  
But then, it does not matter. Strange how few,  
After all's said and done, the things that are  
Of moment.

Few indeed! When I can make  
Of ten small words a rope to hang the world!  
“I had you and I have you now no more.”  
There, there it dangles,—where’s the little truth  
That can for long keep footing under that  
When its slack syllables tighten to a thought?  
Here, let me write it down! I wish to see  
Just how a thing like that will look on paper!

*“I had you and I have you now no more.”*

O little words, how can you run so straight  
Across the page, beneath the weight you bear?  
How can you fall apart, whom such a theme  
Has bound together, and hereafter aid  
In trivial expression, that have been  
So hideously dignified?

Would God  
That tearing you apart would tear the thread  
I strung you on! Would God—O God, my mind  
Stretches asunder on this merciless rack  
Of imagery! Oh, let me sleep a while!

Would I could sleep, and wake to find me back  
In that sweet summer afternoon with you.  
Summer? 'Tis summer still by the calendar!  
How easily could God, if He so willed,  
Set back the world a little turn or two!—  
Correct its griefs, and brings its joys again!

We were so wholly one I had not thought  
That we could die apart. I had not thought  
That I could move,—and you be stiff and still!  
That I could speak,—and you perforce be dumb!  
I think our heart-strings were, like warp and woof  
In some firm fabric, woven in and out;  
Your golden filaments in fair design  
Across my duller fibre. And today  
The shining strip is rent; the exquisite  
Fine pattern is destroyed; part of your heart  
Aches in my breast; part of my heart lies chilled  
In the damp earth with you. I have been torn  
In two, and suffer for the rest of me.  
What is my life to me? And what am I  
To life,—a ship whose star has guttered out?

A Fear that in the deep night starts awake  
Perpetually, to find its senses strained  
Against the taut strings of the quivering air,  
Awaiting the return of some dread chord?

Dark, Dark, is all I find for metaphor;  
All else were contrast;—save that contrast's wall  
Is down, and all opposed things flow together  
Into a vast monotony, where night  
And day, and frost and thaw, and death and life,  
Are synonyms. What now—what now to me  
Are all the jabbering birds and foolish flowers  
That clutter up the world? You were my song!  
Now, now, let discord scream! You were my flower!  
Now let the world grow weeds! For I shall not  
Plant things above your grave—(the common balm  
Of the conventional woe for its own wound!)  
Amid sensations rendered negative  
By your elimination stands today,  
Certain, unmixed, the element of grief;  
I sorrow; and I shall not mock my truth  
With travesties of suffering, nor seek

To effigy its incorporeal bulk  
In little wry-faced images of woe.  
I cannot call you back; and I desire  
No utterance of my immaterial voice.  
I cannot even turn my face this way  
Or that, and say, "My face is turned to you";  
I know not where you are, I do not know  
If heaven hold you or if earth transmute,  
Body and soul, you into earth again;  
But this I know:—not for one second's space  
Shall I insult my sight with visionings  
Such as the credulous crowd so eager-eyed  
Beholds, self-conjured in the empty air.  
Let the world wail! Let drip its easy tears!  
My sorrow shall be dumb!

—What do I say?  
God! God!—God pity me! Am I gone mad  
That I should spit upon a rosary?  
Am I become so shrunken? Would to God  
I too might feel that frenzied faith whose touch  
Makes temporal the most enduring grief;

Though it must walk a while, as is its wont,  
With wild lamenting! Would I too might weep  
Where weeps the world and hangs its piteous wreaths  
For its new dead! Not Truth, but Faith, it is  
That keeps the world alive. If all at once  
Faith were to slacken,—that unconscious faith  
Which must, I know, yet be the corner-stone  
Of all believing,—birds now flying fearless  
Across, would drop in terror to the earth;  
Fishes would drown; and the all-governing reins  
Would tangle in the frantic hands of God  
And the worlds gallop headlong to destruction!

O God, I see it now, and my sick brain  
Staggers and swoons! How often over me  
Flashes this breathlessness of sudden sight  
In which I see the universe unrolled  
Before me like a scroll and read thereon  
Chaos and Doom, where helpless planets whirl  
Dizzily round and round and round and round,  
Like tops across a table, gathering speed  
With every spin, to waver on the edge

One instant—looking over—and the next  
To shudder and lurch forward out of sight!

Ah, I am worn out—I am wearied out—  
It is too much—I am but flesh and blood,  
And I must sleep. Though you were dead again,  
I am but flesh and blood and I must sleep.

## *The Suicide*

“Curse thee, Life, I will live with thee no more!  
Thou hast mocked me, starved me, beat my body sore!  
And all for a pledge that was not pledged by me,  
I have kissed thy crust and eaten sparingly  
That I might eat again, and met thy sneers  
With deprecations, and thy blows with tears,—  
Aye, from thy glutted lash, glad, crawled away,  
As if spent passion were a holiday!  
And now I go. Nor threat, nor easy vow  
Of tardy kindness can avail thee now  
With me, whence fear and faith alike are flown;  
Lonely I came, and I depart alone,  
And know not where nor unto whom I go;  
But that thou canst not follow me I know.”

Thus I to Life, and ceased; but through my brain  
My thought ran still, until I spake again:

“Ah, but I go not as I came,—no trace  
Is mine to bear away of that old grace  
I brought! I have been heated in thy fires,

Bent by thy hands, fashioned to thy desires,  
Thy mark is on me! I am not the same  
Nor ever more shall be, as when I came.  
Ashes am I of all that once I seemed.  
In me all's sunk that leapt, and all that dreamed  
Is wakeful for alarm,—oh, shame to thee,  
For the ill change that thou hast wrought in me  
Who laugh no more nor lift my throat to sing!  
Ah, Life, I would have been a pleasant thing  
To have about the house when I was grown  
If thou hadst left my little joys alone!  
I asked of thee no favour save this one:  
That thou wouldst leave me playing in the sun!  
And this thou didst deny, calling my name  
Insistently, until I rose and came.  
I saw the sun no more.—It were not well  
So long on these unpleasant thoughts to dwell,  
Need I arise tomorrow and renew  
Again my hated tasks, but I am through  
With all things save my thoughts and this one night;  
So that in truth I seem already quite  
Free and remote from thee,—I feel no haste  
And no reluctance to depart; I taste

Merely, with thoughtful mien, an unknown draught,  
That in a little while I shall have quaffed."

Thus I to Life, and ceased, and slightly smiled,  
Looking at nothing; and my thin dreams filed  
Before me one by one till once again  
I set new words unto an old refrain:

"Treasures thou hast that never have been mine!  
Warm lights in many a secret chamber shine  
Of thy gaunt house, and gusts of song have blown  
Like blossoms out to me that sat alone!  
And I have waited well for thee to show  
If any share were mine,—and now I go!  
Nothing I leave, and if I naught attain  
I shall but come into mine own again!"

Thus I to Life, and ceased, and spake no more,  
But turning, straightway sought a certain door  
In the rear wall. Heavy it was, and low  
And dark,—a way by which none e'er would go

That other exit had, and never knock  
Was heard thereat,—bearing a curious lock,  
Some chance had shown me fashioned faultily,  
Whereof Life held content the useless key;  
And great coarse hinges, thick and rough with rust,  
Whose sudden voice across a silence must,  
I knew, be harsh and horrible to hear,—  
A strange door, ugly like a dwarf.—So near  
I came I felt upon my feet the chill  
Of acid wind creeping across the sill.  
So stood longtime, till over me at last  
Came weariness, and all things other passed  
To make it room; the still night drifted deep  
Like snow about me, and I longed for sleep.

But, suddenly, marking the morning hour,  
Bayed the deep-throated bell within the tower!  
Startled, I raised my head,—and with a shout  
Laid hold upon the latch,—and was without.

---

Ah, long-forgotten, well-remembered road,  
Leading me back unto my old abode,  
My Father's house! There in the night I came,  
And found them feasting, and all things the same  
As they had been before. A splendour hung  
Upon the walls, and such sweet songs were sung  
As, echoing out of very long ago,  
Had called me from the house of Life, I know.  
So fair their raiment shone I looked in shame  
On the unlovely garb in which I came;  
Then straightway at my hesitancy mocked:  
"It is my Father's house!" I said and knocked;  
And the door opened. To the shining crowd  
Tattered and dark I entered, like a cloud,  
Seeing no face but His; to Him I crept,  
And "Father!" I cried, and clasped His knees, and wept.

---

Ah, days of joy that followed! All alone  
I wandered through the house. My own, my own,  
My own to touch, my own to taste and smell,  
All I had lacked so long and loved so well!

None shook me out of sleep, nor hushed my song,  
Nor called me in from the sunlight all day long.

I know not when the wonder came to me  
Of what my Father's business might be,  
And whither fared and on what errands bent  
The tall and gracious messengers He sent.  
Yet one day with no song from dawn till night  
Wondering, I sat, and watched them out of sight.  
And the next day I called; and on the third  
Asked them if I might go,—but no one heard.  
Then, sick with longing, I arose at last  
And went unto my Father,—in that vast  
Chamber wherein He for so many years  
Has sat, surrounded by His charts and spheres.  
“Father,” I said, “Father, I cannot play  
The harp that Thou didst give me, and all day  
I sit in idleness, while to and fro  
About me Thy serene, grave servants go;  
And I am weary of my lonely ease.  
Better a perilous journey overseas  
Away from Thee, than this, the life I lead,

To sit all day in the sunshine like a weed  
That grows to naught,—I love Thee more than they  
Who serve Thee most; yet serve Thee in no way.  
Father, I beg of Thee a little task  
To dignify my days,—’tis all I ask  
Forever, but forever, this denied,  
I perish.”

“Child,” my Father’s voice replied,  
“All things thy fancy hath desired of me  
Thou hast received. I have prepared for thee  
Within my house a spacious chamber, where  
Are delicate things to handle and to wear,  
And all these things are thine. Dost thou love song?  
My minstrels shall attend thee all day long.  
Or sigh for flowers? My fairest gardens stand  
Open as fields to thee on every hand.  
And all thy days this word shall hold the same:  
No pleasure shalt thou lack that thou shalt name.  
But as for tasks—” He smiled, and shook His head;  
“Thou hadst thy task, and laidst it by,” He said.

*God's World*

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!  
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!  
Thy mists, that roll and rise!  
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag  
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag  
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!  
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Long have I known a glory in it all,  
But never knew I this:  
Here such a passion is  
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear  
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;  
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall  
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

*Afternoon on a Hill*

I will be the gladdest thing  
Under the sun!  
I will touch a hundred flowers  
And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds  
With quiet eyes,  
Watch the wind bow down the grass,  
And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show  
Up from the town,  
I will mark which must be mine,  
And then start down!

*Sorrow*

Sorrow like a ceaseless rain  
    Beats upon my heart.  
People twist and scream in pain,—  
Dawn will find them still again;  
This has neither wax nor wane,  
    Neither stop nor start.

People dress and go to town;  
    I sit in my chair.  
All my thoughts are slow and brown:  
Standing up or sitting down  
Little matters, or what gown  
    Or what shoes I wear.

## *Tavern*

I'll keep a little tavern  
Below the high hill's crest,  
Wherein all grey-eyed people  
May sit them down and rest.

There shall be plates a-plenty,  
And mugs to melt the chill  
Of all the grey-eyed people  
Who happen up the hill.

There sound will sleep the traveller,  
And dream his journey's end,  
But I will rouse at midnight  
The falling fire to tend.

Aye, 'tis a curious fancy—  
But all the good I know  
Was taught me out of two grey eyes  
A long time ago.

*Ashes of Life*

Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike;  
Eat I must, and sleep I will,—and would that night were here!  
But ah!—to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike!  
Would that it were day again!—with twilight near!

Love has gone and left me and I don't know what to do;  
This or that or what you will is all the same to me;  
But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through,—  
There's little use in anything as far as I can see.

Love has gone and left me,—and the neighbours knock and borrow,  
And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse,—  
And tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
There's this little street and this little house.

*The Little Ghost*

I knew her for a little ghost  
That in my garden walked;  
The wall is high—higher than most—  
And the green gate was locked.

And yet I did not think of that  
Till after she was gone—  
I knew her by the broad white hat,  
All ruffled, she had on,

By the dear ruffles round her feet,  
By her small hands that hung  
In their lace mitts, austere and sweet,  
Her gown's white folds among.

I watched to see if she would stay,  
What she would do—and oh!  
She looked as if she liked the way  
I let my garden grow!

She bent above my favourite mint  
With conscious garden grace,  
She smiled and smiled—there was no hint  
Of sadness in her face.

She held her gown on either side  
To let her slippers show,  
And up the walk she went with pride,  
The way great ladies go.

And where the wall is built in new,  
And is of ivy bare,  
She paused—then opened and passed through  
A gate that once was there.

*Kin to Sorrow*

Am I kin to Sorrow,  
That so oft  
Falls the knocker of my door—  
Neither loud nor soft,  
But as long accustomed—  
Under Sorrow's hand?  
Marigolds around the step  
And rosemary stand,  
And then comes Sorrow—  
And what does Sorrow care  
For the rosemary  
Or the marigolds there?  
Am I kin to Sorrow?  
Are we kin?  
That so oft upon my door—  
*Oh, come in!*

*Three Songs of Shattering*

I

The first rose on my rose-tree  
    Budded, bloomed, and shattered,  
During sad days when to me  
    Nothing mattered.

Grief of grief has drained me clean ;  
    Still it seems a pity  
No one saw,—it must have been  
    Very pretty.

## II

Let the little birds sing;  
Let the little lambs play;  
Spring is here; and so 'tis spring;—  
But not in the old way!

I recall a place  
Where a plum-tree grew;  
There you lifted up your face,  
And blossoms covered you.

If the little birds sing,  
And the little lambs play,  
Spring is here; and so 'tis spring—  
But not in the old way!

### III

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree!

Ere spring was going—ah, spring is gone!

And there comes no summer to the like of you and me,—

Blossom time is early, but no fruit sets on.

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree,

Browned at the edges, turned in a day;

And I would with all my heart they trimmed a mound for me,

And weeds were tall on all the paths that led that way!

*The Shroud*

Death, I say, my heart is bowed  
Unto thine,—O mother!  
This red gown will make a shroud  
Good as any other!

(I, that would not wait to wear  
My own bridal things,  
In a dress dark as my hair  
Made my answerings.

I, to-night, that till he came  
Could not, could not wait,  
In a gown as bright as flame  
Held for them the gate.)

Death, I say, my heart is bowed  
Unto thine,—O mother!  
This red gown will make a shroud  
Good as any other!

*The Dream*

Love, if I weep it will not matter,  
And if you laugh I shall not care;  
Foolish am I to think about it,  
But it is good to feel you there.

Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking,—  
White and awful the moonlight reached  
Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere  
There was a shutter loose,—it screeched!—

Swung in the wind!—and no wind blowing!—  
I was afraid, and turned to you,  
Put out my hand to you for comfort,—  
And you were gone! Cold, cold as dew,

Under my hand the moonlight lay!  
Love, if you laugh I shall not care,  
But if I weep it will not matter,—  
Ah, it is good to feel you there!

## *Indifference*

I said,—for Love was laggard, oh, Love was slow to come,—

“I’ll hear his step and know his step when I am warm in bed;

But I’ll never leave my pillow, though there be some

As would let him in—and take him in with tears!” I said.

I lay,—for Love was laggard, oh, he came not until dawn,—

I lay and listened for his step and could not get to sleep;

And he found me at my window with my big cloak on,

All sorry with the tears some folks might weep!

*Witch-Wife*

She is neither pink nor pale,  
And she never will be all mine;  
She learned her hands in a fairy-tale,  
And her mouth on a valentine.

She has more hair than she needs;  
In the sun 'tis a woe to me!  
And her voice is a string of coloured beads,  
Or steps leading into the sea.

She loves me all that she can,  
And her ways to my ways resign;  
But she was not made for any man,  
And she never will be all mine.

## *Blight*

Hard seeds of hate I planted  
That should by now be grown,—  
Rough stalks, and from thick stamens  
A poisonous pollen blown,  
And odours rank, unbreathable,  
From dark corollas thrown!

At dawn from my damp garden  
I shook the chilly dew;  
The thin boughs locked behind me  
That sprang to let me through;  
The blossoms slept,—I sought a place  
Where nothing lovely grew.

And there, when day was breaking,  
I knelt and looked around:  
The light was near, the silence  
Was palpitant with sound;  
I drew my hate from out my breast  
And thrust it in the ground.

Oh, ye so fiercely tended,  
Ye little seeds of hate!  
I bent above your growing  
Early and noon and late,  
Yet are ye drooped and pitiful,—  
I cannot rear ye straight!

The sun seeks out my garden,  
No nook is left in shade,  
No mist nor mold nor mildew  
Endures on any blade,  
Sweet rain slants under every bough:  
Ye falter, and ye fade.

*When the Year Grows Old*

I cannot but remember  
When the year grows old—  
October—November—  
How she disliked the cold!

She used to watch the swallows  
Go down across the sky,  
And turn from the window  
With a little sharp sigh.

And often when the brown leaves  
Were brittle on the ground,  
And the wind in the chimney  
Made a melancholy sound,

She had a look about her  
That I wish I could forget—  
The look of a scared thing  
Sitting in a net!

Oh, beautiful at nightfall  
The soft spitting snow!  
And beautiful the bare boughs  
Rubbing to and fro!

But the roaring of the fire,  
And the warmth of fur,  
And the boiling of the kettle  
Were beautiful to her!

I cannot but remember  
When the year grows old—  
October—November—  
How she disliked the cold!

From *SECOND APRIL*

Υ



## *Spring*

To what purpose, April, do you return again?  
Beauty is not enough.  
You can no longer quiet me with the redness  
Of little leaves opening stickily.  
I know what I know.  
The sun is hot on my neck as I observe  
The spikes of the crocus.  
The smell of the earth is good.  
It is apparent that there is no death.  
But what does that signify?  
Not only under ground are the brains of men  
Eaten by maggots.  
Life in itself  
Is nothing,  
An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.  
It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,  
April  
Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.

### *City Trees*

The trees along this city street,  
Save for the traffic and the trains,  
Would make a sound as thin and sweet  
As trees in country lanes.

And people standing in their shade  
Out of a shower, undoubtedly  
Would hear such music as is made  
Upon a country tree.

Oh, little leaves that are so dumb  
Against the shrieking city air,  
I watch you when the wind has come,—  
I know what sound is there.

*The Blue-Flag in the Bog*

God had called us, and we came ;  
Our loved Earth to ashes left ;  
Heaven was a neighbour's house,  
Open flung to us, bereft.

Gay the lights of Heaven showed,  
And 'twas God who walked ahead ;  
Yet I wept along the road,  
Wanting my own house instead.

Wept unseen, unheeded cried,  
"All you things my eyes have kissed,  
Fare you well! We meet no more,  
Lovely, lovely tattered mist!

Weary wings that rise and fall  
All day long above the fire!"  
(Red with heat was every wall,  
Rough with heat was every wire)

“Fare you well, you little winds  
That the flying embers chase!  
Fare you well, you shuddering day,  
With your hands before your face!

And, ah, blackened by strange blight,  
Or to a false sun unfurled,  
Now forevermore goodbye,  
All the gardens in the world!

On the windless hills of Heaven,  
That I have no wish to see,  
White, eternal lilies stand,  
By a lake of ebony.

But the Earth forevermore  
Is a place where nothing grows,—  
Dawn will come, and no bud break;  
Evening, and no blossom close.

Spring will come, and wander slow  
Over an indifferent land,  
Stand beside an empty creek,  
Hold a dead seed in her hand.”

---

God had called us, and we came,  
But the blessèd road I trod  
Was a bitter road to me,  
And at heart I questioned God.

“Though in Heaven,” I said, “be all  
That the heart would most desire,  
Held Earth naught save souls of sinners  
Worth the saving from a fire?

Withered grass,—the wasted growing!  
Aimless ache of laden boughs!”  
Little things God had forgotten  
Called me, from my burning house.

“Though in Heaven,” I said, “be all  
That the eye could ask to see,  
All the things I ever knew  
Are this blaze in back of me.”

“Though in Heaven,” I said, “be all  
That the ear could think to lack,  
All the things I ever knew  
Are this roaring at my back.”

---

It was God who walked ahead,  
Like a shepherd to the fold;  
In his footsteps fared the weak,  
And the weary and the old,

Glad enough of gladness over,  
Ready for the peace to be,—  
But a thing God had forgotten  
Was the growing bones of me.

And I drew a bit apart,  
And I lagged a bit behind,  
And I thought on Peace Eternal,  
Lest He look into my mind:

And I gazed upon the sky,  
And I thought of Heavenly Rest,—  
And I slipped away like water  
Through the fingers of the blest!

All their eyes were fixed on Glory,  
Not a glance brushed over me;  
“Alleluia! Alleluia!”  
Up the road,—and I was free.

And my heart rose like a freshet,  
And it swept me on before,  
Giddy as a whirling stick,  
Till I felt the earth once more.

---

All the Earth was charred and black,  
Fire had swept from pole to pole;  
And the bottom of the sea  
Was as brittle as a bowl;

And the timbered mountain-top  
Was as naked as a skull,—  
Nothing left, nothing left,  
Of the Earth so beautiful!

“Earth,” I said, “how can I leave you?”  
“You are all I have,” I said;  
“What is left to take my mind up,  
Living always, and you dead?”

“Speak!” I said, “Oh, tell me something!  
Make a sign that I can see!  
For a keepsake! To keep always!  
Quick!—before God misses me!”

And I listened for a voice;—  
But my heart was all I heard;  
Not a screech-owl, not a loon,  
Not a tree-toad said a word.

And I waited for a sign;—  
Coals and cinders, nothing more;  
And a little cloud of smoke  
Floating on a valley floor.

And I peered into the smoke  
Till it rotted, like a fog:—  
There, encompassed round by fire,  
Stood a blue-flag in a bog!

Little flames came wading out,  
Straining, straining towards its stem,  
But it was so blue and tall  
That it scorned to think of them!

Red and thirsty were their tongues,  
As the tongues of wolves must be,  
But it was so blue and tall—  
Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see!

All my heart became a tear,  
All my soul became a tower,  
Never loved I anything  
As I loved that tall blue flower!

It was all the little boats  
That had ever sailed the sea,  
It was all the little books  
That had gone to school with me;

On its roots like iron claws  
Rearing up so blue and tall,—  
It was all the gallant Earth  
With its back against a wall!

In a breath, ere I had breathed,—  
Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see!—  
I was kneeling at its side,  
And it leaned its head on me!

---

Crumbling stones and sliding sand  
Is the road to Heaven now;  
Icy at my straining knees  
Drags the awful under-tow;

Soon but stepping-stones of dust  
Will the road to Heaven be,—  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Reach a hand and rescue me!

•

“There—there, my blue-flag flower;  
Hush—hush—go to sleep;  
That is only God you hear,  
Counting up His folded sheep!

Lullabye—lullabye—

That is only God that calls,  
Missing me, seeking me,  
Ere the road to nothing falls!

He will set His mighty feet  
Firmly on the sliding sand;  
Like a little frightened bird  
I will creep into His hand;

I will tell Him all my grief,  
I will tell Him all my sin;  
He will give me half His robe  
For a cloak to wrap you in.

Lullabye—lullabye—”

Rocks the burnt-out planet free!—  
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Reach a hand and rescue me!

Ah, the voice of love at last!  
Lo, at last the face of light!  
And the whole of His white robe  
For a cloak against the night!

And upon my heart asleep  
All the things I ever knew!—  
“Holds Heaven not some cranny, Lord,  
For a flower so tall and blue?”

All's well and all's well!  
Gay the lights of Heaven show!  
In some moist and Heavenly place  
We will set it out to grow.

## *Journey*

Ah, could I lay me down in this long grass  
And close my eyes, and let the quiet wind  
Blow over me—I am so tired, so tired  
Of passing pleasant places! All my life,  
Following Care along the dusty road,  
Have I looked back at loveliness and sighed;  
Yet at my hand an unrelenting hand  
Tugged ever, and I passed. All my life long  
Over my shoulder have I looked at peace;  
And now I fain would lie in this long grass  
And close my eyes.

Yet onward!

Cat birds call

Through the long afternoon, and creeks at dusk  
Are guttural. Whip-poor-wills wake and cry,  
Drawing the twilight close about their throats.  
Only my heart makes answer. Eager vines  
Go up the rocks and wait; flushed apple-trees

Pause in their dance and break the ring for me ;  
Dim, shady wood-roads, redolent of fern  
And bayberry, that through sweet bevvies thread  
Of round-faced roses, pink and petulant,  
Look back and beckon ere they disappear.  
Only my heart, only my heart responds.

Yet, ah, my path is sweet on either side  
All through the dragging day,—sharp underfoot  
And hot, and like dead mist the dry dust hangs—  
But far, oh, far as passionate eye can reach,  
And long, ah, long as rapturous eye can cling,  
The world is mine: blue hill, still silver lake,  
Broad field, bright flower, and the long white road ;  
A gateless garden, and an open path ;  
My feet to follow, and my heart to hold.

*Eel-Grass*

No matter what I say,  
All that I really love  
Is the rain that flattens on the bay,  
And the eel-grass in the cove;  
The jingle-shells that lie and bleach  
At the tide-line, and the trace  
Of higher tides along the beach:  
Nothing in this place.

*Elegy Before Death*

There will be rose and rhododendron  
When you are dead and under ground;  
Still will be heard from white syringas  
Heavy with bees, a sunny sound;

Still will the tamaracks be raining  
After the rain has ceased, and still  
Will there be robins in the stubble,  
Grey sheep upon the warm green hill.

Spring will not ail nor autumn falter;  
Nothing will know that you are gone,—  
Saving alone some sullen plough-land  
None but yourself sets foot upon;

Saving the may-weed and the pig-weed  
Nothing will know that you are dead,—  
These, and perhaps a useless wagon  
Standing beside some tumbled shed.

Oh, there will pass with your great passing  
Little of beauty not your own,—  
Only the light from common water,  
Only the grace from simple stone!

## *The Bean-Stalk*

Ho, Giant! This is I!  
I have built me a bean-stalk into your sky!  
La,—but it's lovely, up so high!

This is how I came,—I put  
Here my knee, there my foot,  
Up and up, from shoot to shoot—  
And the blessed bean-stalk thinning  
Like the mischief all the time,  
Till it took me rocking, spinning,  
In a dizzy, sunny circle,  
Making angles with the root,  
Far and out above the cackle  
Of the city I was born in,  
Till the little dirty city  
In the light so sheer and sunny  
Shone as dazzling bright and pretty  
As the money that you find  
In a dream of finding money—  
What a wind! What a morning!—

Till the tiny, shiny city,  
When I shot a glance below,  
Shaken with a giddy laughter,  
Sick and blissfully afraid,  
Was a dew-drop on a blade,  
And a pair of moments after  
Was the whirling guess I made,—  
And the wind was like a whip  
Cracking past my icy ears,  
And my hair stood out behind,  
And my eyes were full of tears,  
Wide-open and cold,  
More tears than they could hold,  
The wind was blowing so,  
And my teeth were in a row,  
Dry and grinning,  
And I felt my foot slip,  
And I scratched the wind and whined,  
And I clutched the stalk and jabbered,  
With my eyes shut blind,—  
What a wind! What a wind!

Your broad sky, Giant,  
Is the shelf of a cupboard;  
I make bean-stalks, I'm  
A builder, like yourself,  
But bean-stalks is my trade,  
I couldn't make a shelf,  
Don't know how they're made,  
Now, a bean-stalk is more pliant—  
La, what a climb!

*Weeds*

White with daisies and red with sorrel  
And empty, empty under the sky!—  
Life is a quest and love a quarrel—  
Here is a place for me to lie.

Daisies spring from damnèd seeds,  
And this red fire that here I see  
Is a worthless crop of crimson weeds,  
Cursed by farmers thriftily.

But here, unhated for an hour,  
The sorrel runs in ragged flame,  
The daisy stands, a bastard flower,  
Like flowers that bear an honest name.

And here a while, where no wind brings  
The baying of a pack athirst,  
May sleep the sleep of blessèd things,  
The blood too bright, the brow accurst.

*Passer Mortuus Est*

Death devours all lovely things:

Lesbia with her sparrow  
Shares the darkness,—presently  
Every bed is narrow.

Unremembered as old rain

Dries the sheer libation;  
And the little petulant hand  
Is an annotation.

After all, my erstwhile dear,

My no longer cherished,  
Need we say it was not love,  
Just because it perished?

*Pastoral*

If it were only still!—  
With far away the shrill  
Crying of a cock;  
Or the shaken bell  
From a cow's throat  
Moving through the bushes;  
Or the soft shock  
Of wizened apples falling  
From an old tree  
In a forgotten orchard  
Upon the hilly rock!

Oh, grey hill,  
Where the grazing herd  
Licks the purple blossom,  
Crops the spiky weed!  
Oh, stony pasture,  
Where the tall mullein  
Stands up so sturdy  
On its little seed!

### *Assault*

I had forgotten how the frogs must sound  
After a year of silence, else I think  
I should not so have ventured forth alone  
At dusk upon this unfrequented road.

I am waylaid by Beauty. Who will walk  
Between me and the crying of the frogs?  
Oh, savage Beauty, suffer me to pass,  
That am a timid woman, on her way  
From one house to another!

## *Travel*

The railroad track is miles away,  
And the day is loud with voices speaking,  
Yet there isn't a train goes by all day  
But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,  
Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming,  
But I see its cinders red on the sky,  
And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,  
And better friends I'll not be knowing;  
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,  
No matter where it's going.

*Low-Tide*

These wet rocks where the tide has been,  
    Barnacled white and weeded brown  
And slimed beneath to a beautiful green,  
    These wet rocks where the tide went down  
Will show again when the tide is high  
    Faint and perilous, far from shore,  
No place to dream, but a place to die:  
    The bottom of the sea once more.

*There was a child that wandered through  
    A giant's empty house all day,—  
House full of wonderful things and new,  
    But no fit place for a child to play!*

*Song of a Second April*

April this year, not otherwise  
Than April of a year ago,  
Is full of whispers, full of sighs,  
Of dazzling mud and dingy snow ;  
Hepaticas that pleased you so  
Are here again, and butterflies.

There rings a hammering all day,  
And shingles lie about the doors ;  
In orchards near and far away  
The grey wood-pecker taps and bores ;  
And men are merry at their chores,  
And children earnest at their play.

The larger streams run still and deep,  
Noisy and swift the small brooks run ;  
Among the mullein stalks the sheep  
Go up the hillside in the sun,  
Pensively,—only you are gone,  
You that alone I cared to keep.

*Rosemary*

For the sake of some things  
That be now no more  
I will strew rushes  
On my chamber-floor,  
I will plant bergamot  
At my kitchen-door.

For the sake of dim things  
That were once so plain  
I will set a barrel  
Out to catch the rain,  
I will hang an iron pot  
On an iron crane.

Many things be dead and gone  
That were brave and gay;  
For the sake of these things  
I will learn to say,  
"An it please you, gentle sirs,"  
"Alack!" and "Well-a-day!"

*The Poet and His Book*

*Down, you mongrel, Death!*  
*Back into your kennel!*  
*I have stolen breath*  
*In a stalk of fennel!*  
*You shall scratch and you shall whine*  
*Many a night, and you shall worry*  
*Many a bone, before you bury*  
*One sweet bone of mine!*

When shall I be dead?  
    When my flesh is withered,  
And above my head  
    Yellow pollen gathered  
All the empty afternoon?  
    When sweet lovers pause and wonder  
    Who am I that lie thereunder,  
Hidden from the moon?

This my personal death?—  
    That my lungs be failing  
To inhale the breath

Others are exhaling?  
This my subtle spirit's end?—  
Ah, when the thawed winter splashes  
Over these chance dust and ashes,  
Weep not me, my friend!

Me, by no means dead  
In that hour, but surely  
When this book, unread,  
Rots to earth obscurely,  
And no more to any breast,  
Close against the clamorous swelling  
Of the thing there is no telling,  
Are these pages pressed!

When this book is mould,  
And a book of many  
Waiting to be sold  
For a casual penny,  
In a little open case,  
In a street unclean and cluttered,  
Where a heavy mud is spattered  
From the passing drays,

Stranger, pause and look ;  
From the dust of ages  
Lift this little book,  
Turn the tattered pages,  
Read me, do not let me die!  
Search the fading letters, finding  
Steadfast in the broken binding  
All that once was I!

When these veins are weeds,  
When these hollowed sockets  
Watch the rooty seeds  
Bursting down like rockets,  
And surmise the spring again,  
Or, remote in that black cupboard,  
Watch the pink worms writhing upward  
At the smell of rain,

Boys and girls that lie  
Whispering in the hedges,  
Do not let me die,  
Mix me with your pledges;  
Boys and girls that slowly walk

In the woods, and weep, and quarrel,  
Staring past the pink wild laurel,  
Mix me with your talk,

Do not let me die!

Farmers at your raking,  
When the sun is high,  
While the hay is making,  
When, along the stubble strewn,  
Withering on their stalks uneaten,  
Strawberries turn dark and sweeten  
In the lapse of noon ;

Shepherds on the hills,  
In the pastures, drowsing  
To the tinkling bells  
Of the brown sheep browsing ;  
Sailors crying through the storm ;  
Scholars at your study ; hunters  
Lost amid the whirling winter's  
Whiteness uniform ;

Men that long for sleep ;  
    Men that wake and revel ;—  
If an old song leap  
    To your senses' level  
At such moments, may it be  
    Sometimes, though a moment only,  
    Some forgotten, quaint and homely  
Vehicle of me !

Women at your toil,  
    Women at your leisure  
Till the kettle boil,  
    Snatch of me your pleasure,  
Where the broom-straw marks the leaf ;  
    Women quiet with your weeping  
    Lest you wake a workman sleeping,  
Mix me with your grief !

Boys and girls that steal  
    From the shocking laughter  
Of the old, to kneel  
    By a dripping rafter

Under the discoloured eaves,  
Out of trunks with hingeless covers  
Lifting tales of saints and lovers,  
Travellers, goblins, thieves,

Suns that shine by night,  
Mountains made from valleys,—  
Bear me to the light,  
Flat upon your bellies  
By the webby window lie,  
Where the little flies are crawling,  
Read me, margin me with scrawling,  
Do not let me die!

*Sexton, ply your trade!  
In a shower of gravel  
Stamp upon your spade!  
Many a rose shall ravel,  
Many a metal wreath shall rust  
In the rain, and I go singing  
Through the lots where you are flinging  
Yellow clay on dust!*

*Alms*

My heart is what it was before,  
A house where people come and go ;  
But it is winter with your love,  
The sashes are beset with snow.

I light the lamp and lay the cloth,  
I blow the coals to blaze again ;  
But it is winter with your love,  
The frost is thick upon the pane.

I know a winter when it comes :  
The leaves are listless on the boughs ;  
I watched your love a little while,  
And brought my plants into the house.

I water them and turn them south,  
I snap the dead brown from the stem ;  
But it is winter with your love,  
I only tend and water them.

There was a time I stood and watched  
The small, ill-natured sparrows' fray;  
I loved the beggar that I fed,  
I cared for what he had to say,

I stood and watched him out of sight;  
Today I reach around the door  
And set a bowl upon the step;  
My heart is what it was before,

But it is winter with your love;  
I scatter crumbs upon the sill,  
And close the window,—and the birds  
May take or leave them, as they will.

## *Inland*

People that build their houses inland,  
People that buy a plot of ground  
Shaped like a house, and build a house there,  
Far from the sea-board, far from the sound

Of water sucking the hollow ledges,  
Tons of water striking the shore,—  
What do they long for, as I long for  
One salt smell of the sea once more?

People the waves have not awakened,  
Spanking the boats at the harbour's head,  
What do they long for, as I long for,—  
Starting up in my inland bed,

Beating the narrow walls, and finding  
Neither a window nor a door,  
Screaming to God for death by drowning,—  
One salt taste of the sea once more?

*To a Poet that Died Young*

Minstrel, what have you to do  
With this man that, after you,  
Sharing not your happy fate,  
Sat as England's Laureate?  
Vainly, in these iron days,  
Strives the poet in your praise,  
Minstrel, by whose singing side  
Beauty walked, until you died.

Still, though none should hark again,  
Drones the blue-fly in the pane,  
Thickly crusts the blackest moss,  
Blows the rose its musk across,  
Floats the boat that is forgot  
None the less to Camelot.

Many a bard's untimely death  
Lends unto his verses breath;  
Here's a song was never sung:  
Growing old is dying young.

Minstrel, what is this to you:  
That a man you never knew,  
When your grave was far and green,  
Sat and gossiped with a queen?

Thalia knows how rare a thing  
Is it, to grow old and sing,  
When the brown and tepid tide  
Closes in on every side.  
Who shall say if Shelley's gold  
Had withstood it to grow old?

*Wraith*

“Thin Rain, whom are you haunting,  
That you haunt my door?”  
*Surely it is not I she’s wanting . . .*  
*Someone living here before!*  
“Nobody’s in the house but me:  
You may come in if you like and see.”

Thin as thread, with exquisite fingers,—  
Ever seen her, any of you?—  
Grey shawl, and leaning on the wind,  
And the garden showing through?

Glimmering eyes,—and silent, mostly,  
Sort of a whisper, sort of a purr,  
Asking something, asking it over,  
If you get a sound from her.—

Ever see her, any of you?—  
Strangest thing I’ve ever known,—  
Every night since I moved in,  
And I came to be alone.

“Thin Rain, hush with your knocking!  
You may not come in!  
This is I that you hear rocking;  
Nobody’s with me, nor has been!”

Curious, how she tried the window,—  
Odd, the way she tries the door,—  
*Wonder just what sort of people  
Could have had this house before . . .*

*Ebb*

I know what my heart is like  
    Since your love died:  
It is like a hollow ledge  
Holding a little pool  
    Left there by the tide,  
    A little tepid pool,  
Drying inward from the edge.

*Elaine*

Oh, come again to Astolat!

I will not ask you to be kind.  
And you may go when you will go,  
And I will stay behind.

I will not say how dear you are,  
Or ask you if you hold me dear,  
Or trouble you with things for you,  
The way I did last year.

So still the orchard, Lancelot,  
So very still the lake shall be,  
You could not guess—though you should guess—  
What is become of me.

So wide shall be the garden-walk,  
The garden-seat so very wide,  
You needs must think—if you should think—  
The lily maid had died.

Save that, a little way away,  
I'd watch you for a little while,  
To see you speak, the way you speak,  
And smile,—if you should smile.

*Burial*

Mine is a body that should die at sea!  
And have for a grave, instead of a grave  
Six feet deep and the length of me,  
All the water that is under the wave!

And terrible fishes to seize my flesh,  
Such as a living man might fear,  
And eat me while I am firm and fresh,—  
Not wait till I've been dead for a year!

*Mariposa*

Butterflies are white and blue  
In this field we wander through.  
Suffer me to take your hand.  
Death comes in a day or two.

All the things we ever knew  
Will be ashes in that hour:  
Mark the transient butterfly,  
How he hangs upon the flower.

Suffer me to take your hand.  
Suffer me to cherish you  
Till the dawn is in the sky.  
Whether I be false or true,  
Death comes in a day or two.

*The Little Hill*

Oh, here the air is sweet and still,  
And soft's the grass to lie on;  
And far away's the little hill  
They took for Christ to die on.

And there's a hill across the brook,  
And down the brook's another;  
But, oh, the little hill they took,—  
I think I am its mother!

The moon that saw Gethsemane,  
I watch it rise and set;  
It has so many things to see,  
They help it to forget.

But little hills that sit at home  
So many hundred years,  
Remember Greece, remember Rome,  
Remember Mary's tears.

And far away in Palestine,  
Sadder than any other,  
Grieves still the hill that I call mine,—  
I think I am its mother.

*Doubt No More that Oberon*

Doubt no more that Oberon—  
Never doubt that Pan  
Lived, and played a reed, and ran  
After nymphs in a dark forest,  
In the merry, credulous days,—  
Lived, and led a fairy band  
Over the indulgent land!

Ah, for in this dourest, sorest  
Age man's eye has looked upon,  
Death to fauns and death to fays,  
Still the dog-wood dares to raise—  
Healthy tree, with trunk and root—  
Ivory bowls that bear no fruit,  
And the starlings and the jays—  
Birds that cannot even sing—  
Dare to come again in spring!

*Lament*

Listen, children :  
Your father is dead.  
From his old coats  
I'll make you little jackets ;  
I'll make you little trousers  
From his old pants.  
There'll be in his pockets  
Things he used to put there,  
Keys and pennies  
Covered with tobacco ;  
Dan shall have the pennies  
To save in his bank ;  
Anne shall have the keys  
To make a pretty noise with.  
Life must go on,  
And the dead be forgotten ;  
Life must go on,  
Though good men die ;

Anne, eat your breakfast ;  
Dan, take your medicine ;  
Life must go on ;  
I forget just why.

## *Exiled*

Searching my heart for its true sorrow,  
This is the thing I find to be:  
That I am weary of words and people,  
Sick of the city, wanting the sea;

Wanting the sticky, salty sweetness  
Of the strong wind and shattered spray;  
Wanting the loud sound and the soft sound  
Of the big surf that breaks all day.

Always before about my dooryard,  
Marking the reach of the winter sea,  
Rooted in sand and dragging drift-wood,  
Straggled the purple wild sweet-pea;

Always I climbed the wave at morning,  
Shook the sand from my shoes at night,  
That now am caught beneath great buildings,  
Stricken with noise, confused with light.

If I could hear the green piles groaning  
Under the windy wooden piers,  
See once again the bobbing barrels,  
And the black sticks that fence the weirs,

If I could see the weedy mussels  
Crusting the wrecked and rotting hulls,  
Hear once again the hungry crying  
Overhead, of the wheeling gulls,

Feel once again the shanty straining  
Under the turning of the tide,  
Fear once again the rising freshet,  
Dread the bell in the fog outside,

I should be happy!—that was happy  
All day long on the coast of Maine;  
I have a need to hold and handle  
Shells and anchors and ships again!

I should be happy . . . that am happy  
Never at all since I came here.  
I am too long away from water.  
I have a need of water near.

*The Death of Autumn*

When reeds are dead and a straw to thatch the marshes,  
And feathered pampas-grass rides into the wind  
Like agèd warriors westward, tragic, thinned  
Of half their tribe; and over the flattened rushes,  
Stripped of its secret, open, stark and bleak,  
Blackens afar the half-forgotten creek,—  
Then leans on me the weight of the year, and crushes  
My heart. I know that Beauty must ail and die,  
And will be born again,—but ah, to see  
Beauty stiffened, staring up at the sky!  
Oh, Autumn! Autumn!—What is the Spring to me?

*Ode to Silence*

Aye, but she?

Your other sister and my other soul,

Grave Silence, lovelier

Than the three loveliest maidens, what of her?

Clio, not you,

Not you, Calliope,

Nor all your wanton line,

Not Great Apollo's self shall comfort me

For Silence once departed,

For her the cool-tongued, her the tranquil-hearted,

Whom evermore I follow wistfully,

Wandering Heaven and Earth and Hell and the four seasons  
through;

Thalia, not you,

Not you, Melpomene,

Not your incomparable feet, O thin Terpsichore,

I seek in this great hall,

But one more pale, more pensive, most beloved of you all.

I seek her from afar.

I come from temples where her altars are;

From groves that bear her name;—  
Noisy with stricken victims now and sacrificial flame,  
And cymbals struck on high and strident faces  
Obstreperous in her praise  
They neither love nor know,  
A goddess of gone days,  
Departed long ago,  
Abandoning the invaded shrines and fanes  
Of her old sanctuary,  
A deity obscure and legendary,  
Of whom there now remains,  
For sages to decipher and priests to garble,  
Only and for a little while her letters wedged in marble;  
Which even now, behold, the friendly mumbling rain erases,  
And the inarticulate snow,  
Leaving at last of her least signs and traces  
None whatsoever, nor whither she is vanished from these places.

“She will love well,” I said,  
“If love be of that heart inhabiter,  
The flowers of the dead:  
The red anemone that with no sound

Moves in the wind; and from another wound  
That sprang, the heavily-sweet blue hyacinth,  
That blossoms underground;  
And sallow poppies, will be dear to her.  
And will not Silence know  
In the black shade of what obsidian steep  
Stiffens the white narcissus numb with sleep?  
(Seed which Demeter's daughter bore from home,  
Uptorn by desperate fingers long ago,  
Reluctant even as she,  
Undone Persephone,  
And even as she, set out again to grow,  
In twilight, in perdition's lean and inauspicious loam)  
She will love well," I said,  
"The flowers of the dead.  
Where dark Persephone the winter round,  
Uncomforted for home, uncomfortable,  
Lacking a sunny southern slope in northern Sicily,  
With sullen pupils focussed on a dream  
Stares on the stagnant stream  
That moats the unequivocal battlements of Hell,  
There, there will she be found,  
She that is Beauty veiled from men and Music in a swound."

“I long for Silence as they long for breath  
Whose helpless nostrils drink the bitter sea ;  
What thing can be  
So stout, what so redoubtable, in Death  
What fury, what considerable rage, if only she,  
Upon whose icy breast,  
Unquestioned, uncaressed,  
One time I lay,  
And whom always I lack,  
Even to this day,  
Being by no means from that frigid bosom weaned away,  
If only she therewith be given me back ?”

I sought her down that dolorous labyrinth,  
Wherein no shaft of sunlight ever fell,  
And in among the bloodless everywhere  
I sought her ; but the air,  
Breathed many times and spent,  
Was fretful with a whispering discontent ;  
And questioning me, importuning me to tell  
Some slightest tidings of the light of day they know no more,  
Plucking my sleeve, the eager shades were with me where I went.  
I paused at every grievous door,

And harked a moment, holding up my hand,—and for a space  
A hush was on them, while they watched my face;  
And then they fell a-whispering as before;  
So that I smiled at them and left them, seeing she was not there.

I sought her, too,  
Among the upper gods, although I knew  
She was not like to be where feasting is,  
Nor near to Heaven's lord,  
Being a thing abhorred  
And shunned of him, although a child of his,  
(Not yours, not yours: to you she owes not breath,  
Mother of Song, being sown of Zeus upon a dream of Death).

Fearing to pass unvisited some place  
And later learn, too late, how all the while,  
With her still face,  
She had been standing there and seen me pass, without a smile,  
I sought her even to the sagging board whereat  
The stout immortals sat;

But such a laughter shook the mighty hall  
No one could hear me say:  
Had she been seen upon the Hill that day?  
And no one knew at all  
How long I stood, or when at last I sighed and went away.

There is a garden lying in a lull  
Between the mountains and the mountainous sea . . .  
I know not where; but which a dream diurnal  
Paints on my lids a moment, till the hull  
Be lifted from the kernel,  
And Slumber fed to me.  
Your foot-print is not there, Mnemosene,  
Though it would seem a ruined place and after  
Your lichenous heart, being full  
Of broken columns, caryatides  
Thrown to the earth and fallen forward on their jointless knees;  
And urns funereal altered into dust  
Minuter than the ashes of the dead;  
And Psyche's lamp out of the earth up-thrust,  
Dripping itself in marble oil on what was once the bed  
Of Love, and his young body asleep, but now is dust instead.

There twists the bitter-sweet, the white wisteria  
Fastens its fingers in the strangling wall,  
And the wide crannies quicken with bright weeds;  
There dumbly like a worm all day the still white orchid feeds;  
But never an echo of your daughters' laughter  
Is there, nor any sign of you at all  
Swells fungous from the rotten bough, grey mother of Pieria!

Only her shadow once upon a stone  
I saw,—and, lo, the shadow and the garden, too, were gone.

I tell you, you have done her body an ill,  
You chatterers, you noisy crew!  
She is not anywhere!  
I sought her in deep Hell;  
And through the world as well;  
I thought of Heaven and I sought her there:  
Above nor under ground  
Is Silence to be found,  
That was the very warp and woof of you,  
Lovely before your songs began and after they were through!  
Oh, say if on this hill

Somewhere your sister's body lies in death,  
So I may follow there, and make a wreath  
Of my locked hands, that on her quiet breast  
Shall lie till age has withered them!

(Ah, sweetly from the rest

I see  
Turn and consider me  
Compassionate Euterpe!)

"There is a gate beyond the gate of Death,  
Beyond the gate of everlasting Life,  
Beyond the gates of Heaven and Hell," she saith,  
"Whereon but to believe is horror!  
Whereon to meditate engendereth  
Even in deathless spirits such as I  
A tumult in the breath,  
A chilling of the inexhaustible blood  
Even in my veins that never will be dry,  
And in the austere, divine monotony  
That is my being, the madness of an unaccustomed mood.

This is her province whom you lack and seek:  
And seek her not elsewhere.  
Hell is a thoroughfare  
For pilgrims,—Herakles,  
And he that loved Euridice too well,  
Have walked therein; and many more than these;  
And witnessed the desire and the despair  
Of souls that passed reluctantly and sicken for the air;  
You, too, have entered Hell,  
And issued thence; but thence whereof I speak  
None has returned;—for thither fury brings  
Only the driven ghosts of them that flee before all things.  
Oblivion is the name of this abode: and she is there.”

O radiant Song! O gracious Memory!  
Be long upon this height  
I shall not climb again!  
I know the way you mean,—the little night,  
And the long empty day,—never to see  
Again the angry light,  
Or hear the hungry noises cry my brain!

Ah, but she,  
Your other sister and my other soul,  
She shall again be mine.  
And I shall drink her from a silver bowl,  
A chilly thin green wine,  
Not bitter to the taste,  
Not sweet,  
Not of your press, O restless, clamorous Nine,—  
To foam beneath the frantic hoofs of mirth—  
But savouring faintly of the acid earth  
And trod by pensive feet  
From perfect clusters ripened without haste  
Out of the urgent heat  
In some clear glimmering vaulted twilight under the odorous vine.

Lift up your lyres! Sing on!  
But as for me, I seek your sister whither she is gone.

MEMORIAL TO D.C.

(*Vassar College, 1918*)

*O, loveliest throat of all sweet throats,  
Where now no more the music is,  
With hands that wrote you little notes  
I write you little elegies!*

I

*Epitaph*

Heap not on this mound  
Roses that she loved so well;  
Why bewilder her with roses,  
That she cannot see or smell?

She is happy where she lies  
With the dust upon her eyes.

## II

### *Prayer to Persephone*

Be to her, Persephone,  
All the things I might not be;  
Take her head upon your knee.  
She that was so proud and wild,  
Flippant, arrogant and free,  
She that had no need of me,  
Is a little lonely child  
Lost in Hell,—Persephone,  
Take her head upon your knee;  
Say to her, "My dear, my dear,  
It is not so dreadful here."

### III

#### *Chorus*

Give away her gowns,  
Give away her shoes;  
She has no more use  
For her fragrant gowns;  
Take them all down,  
Blue, green, blue,  
Lilac, pink, blue,  
From their padded hangers;  
She will dance no more  
In her narrow shoes;  
Sweep her narrow shoes  
From the closet floor.

## IV

### *Dirge*

Boys and girls that held her dear,  
Do your weeping now ;  
All you loved of her lies here.

Brought to earth the arrogant brow,  
And the withering tongue  
Chastened ; do your weeping now.

Sing whatever songs are sung,  
Wind whatever wreath,  
For a playmate perished young,  
For a spirit spent in death.

Boys and girls that held her dear,  
All you loved of her lies here.

V

*Elegy*

Let them bury your big eyes  
In the secret earth securely,  
Your thin fingers, and your fair,  
Soft, indefinite-coloured hair,—  
All of these in some way, surely,  
From the secret earth shall rise;  
Not for these I sit and stare,  
Broken and bereft completely:  
Your young flesh that sat so neatly  
On your little bones will sweetly  
Blossom in the air.

But your voice . . . never the rushing  
Of a river underground,  
Not the rising of the wind  
In the trees before the rain,  
Not the woodcock's watery call,  
Not the note the white-throat utters,  
Not the feet of children pushing

Yellow leaves along the gutters  
In the blue and bitter fall,  
Shall content my musing mind  
For the beauty of that sound  
That in no new way at all  
Ever will be heard again.

Sweetly through the sappy stalk  
Of the vigorous weed,  
Holding all it held before,  
Cherished by the faithful sun,  
On and on eternally  
Shall your altered fluid run,  
Bud and bloom and go to seed:  
But your singing days are done;  
But the music of your talk  
Never shall the chemistry  
Of the secret earth restore.  
All your lovely words are spoken.  
Once the ivory box is broken,  
Beats the golden bird no more.

*Wild Swans*

I looked in my heart while the wild swans went over.  
And what did I see I had not seen before?  
Only a question less or a question more;  
Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying.  
Tiresome heart, forever living and dying,  
House without air, I leave you and lock your door.  
Wild swans, come over the town, come over  
The town again, trailing your legs and crying!

From *A FEW FIGS FROM THISTLES*

Υ



*First Fig*

My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light!

*Second Fig*

Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:  
Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand!

*Recuerdo*

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—  
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,  
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;  
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,  
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;  
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,  
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,—  
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.  
We hailed, “Good morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,  
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;  
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and pears,  
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

*Thursday*

And if I loved you Wednesday,  
Well, what is that to you?  
I do not love you Thursday—  
So much is true.

And why you come complaining  
Is more than I can see.  
I loved you Wednesday,—yes—but what  
Is that to me?

*To the Not Impossible Him*

How shall I know, unless I go  
To Cairo and Cathay,  
Whether or not this blessed spot  
Is blest in every way?

Now it may be, the flower for me  
Is this beneath my nose;  
How shall I tell, unless I smell  
The Carthaginian rose?

The fabric of my faithful love  
No power shall dim or ravel  
Whilst I stay here,—but oh, my dear,  
If I should ever travel!

*Macdougall Street*

As I went walking up and down to take the evening air,  
(Sweet to meet upon the street, why must I be so shy?)  
I saw him lay his hand upon her torn black hair;  
("Little dirty Latin child, let the lady by!")

The women squatting on the stoops were slovenly and fat,  
(Lay me out in organdie, lay me out in lawn!)  
And everywhere I stepped there was a baby or a cat;  
(Lord God in Heaven, will it never be dawn?)

The fruit-carts and clam-carts were ribald as a fair,  
(Pink nets and wet shells trodden under heel)  
She had haggled from the fruit-man of his rotting ware;  
(I shall never get to sleep, the way I feel!)

He walked like a king through the filth and the clutter,  
(Sweet to meet upon the street, why did you glance me by?)  
But he caught the quaint Italian quip she flung him from the  
gutter;  
(What can there be to cry about that I should lie and cry?)

He laid his darling hand upon her little black head,  
    (I wish I were a ragged child with ear-rings in my ears!)  
And he said she was a baggage to have said what she had said;  
    (Truly I shall be ill unless I stop these tears!)

*The Singing-Woman from the Wood's Edge*

What should I be but a prophet and a liar,  
Whose mother was a leprechaun, whose father was a friar?  
Teethed on a crucifix and cradled under water,  
What should I be but the fiend's god-daughter?

And who should be my playmates but the adder and the frog,  
That was got beneath a furze-bush and born in a bog?  
And what should be my singing, that was christened at an altar,  
But Aves and Credos and Psalms out of the Psalter?

You will see such webs on the wet grass, maybe,  
As a pixie-mother weaves for her baby,  
You will find such flame at the wave's weedy ebb  
As flashes in the meshes of a mer-mother's web,

But there comes to birth no common spawn  
From the love of a priest for a leprechaun,  
And you never have seen and you never will see  
Such things as the things that swaddled me!

After all's said and after all's done,  
What should I be but a harlot and a nun?

In through the bushes, on any foggy day,  
My Da would come a-swishing of the drops away,  
With a prayer for my death and a groan for my birth,  
A-mumbling of his beads for all that he was worth.

And there'd sit my Ma, with her knee beneath her chin,  
A-looking in his face and a-drinking of it in,  
And a-marking in the moss some funny little saying  
That would mean just the opposite of all that he was praying!

He taught me the holy-talk of Vesper and of Matin,  
He heard me my Greek and he heard me my Latin,  
He blessed me and crossed me to keep my soul from evil,  
And we watched him out of sight, and we conjured up the devil!

Oh, the things I haven't seen and the things I haven't known,  
What with hedges and ditches till after I was grown,  
And yanked both ways by my mother and my father,  
With a "Which would you better?" and a "Which would you  
rather?"

With him for a sire and her for a dam,  
What should I be but just what I am?

*She Is Overheard Singing*

Oh, Prue she has a patient man,  
And Joan a gentle lover,  
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,—  
But my true love's a rover!

Mig, her man's as good as cheese  
And honest as a briar,  
Sue tells her love what he's thinking of,—  
But my dear lad's a liar!

Oh, Sue and Prue and Agatha  
Are thick with Mig and Joan!  
They bite their threads and shake their heads  
And gnaw my name like a bone;

And Prue says, "Mine's a patient man,  
As never snaps me up,"  
And Agatha, "Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,  
Could live content in a cup;"

Sue's man's mind is like good jell—

All one color, and clear—

And Mig's no call to think at all

What's to come next year,

While Joan makes boast of a gentle lad,

That's troubled with that and this;—

But they all would give the life they live

For a look from the man I kiss!

Cold he slants his eyes about,

And few enough's his choice,—

Though he'd slip me clean for a nun, or a queen,

Or a beggar with knots in her voice,—

And Agatha will turn awake

While her good man sleeps sound,

And Mig and Sue and Joan and Prue

Will hear the clock strike round,

For Prue she has a patient man,

As asks not when or why,

And Mig and Sue have naught to do  
But peep who's passing by,

Joan is paired with a putterer  
That bastes and tastes and salts,  
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,—  
But my true love is false!

### *The Unexplorer*

There was a road ran past our house  
Too lovely to explore.  
I asked my mother once—she said  
That if you followed where it led  
It brought you to the milk-man's door.  
(That's why I have not travelled more.)

### *Grown-up*

Was it for this I uttered prayers,  
And sobbed and cursed and kicked the stairs,  
That now, domestic as a plate,  
I should retire at half-past eight?

*The Penitent*

I had a little Sorrow,  
Born of a little Sin,  
I found a room all damp with gloom  
And shut us all within;  
And, "Little Sorrow, weep," said I,  
"And, Little Sin, pray God to die,  
And I upon the floor will lie  
And think how bad I've been!"

Alas for pious planning—  
It mattered not a whit!  
As far as gloom went in that room,  
The lamp might have been lit!  
My little Sorrow would not weep,  
My little Sin would go to sleep—  
To save my soul I could not keep  
My graceless mind on it!

So up I got in anger,  
And took a book I had,  
And put a ribbon on my hair  
To please a passing lad,  
And, "One thing there's no getting by—  
I've been a wicked girl," said I;  
"But if I can't be sorry, why,  
I might as well be glad!"

*Daphne*

Why do you follow me?—  
Any moment I can be  
Nothing but a laurel-tree.

Any moment of the chase  
I can leave you in my place  
A pink bough for your embrace.

Yet if over hill and hollow  
Still it is your will to follow,  
I am off;—to heel, Apollo!

*Portrait by a Neighbour*

Before she has her floor swept  
Or her dishes done,  
Any day you'll find her  
A-sunning in the sun!

It's long after midnight  
Her key's in the lock,  
And you never see her chimney smoke  
Till past ten o'clock!

She digs in her garden  
With a shovel and a spoon,  
She weeds her lazy lettuce  
By the light of the moon,

She walks up the walk  
Like a woman in a dream,  
She forgets she borrowed butter  
And pays you back cream!

Her lawn looks like a meadow,  
And if she mows the place  
She leaves the clover standing  
And the Queen Anne's lace!

*Midnight Oil*

Cut if you will, with Sleep's dull knife,  
Each day to half its length, my friend,—  
The years that Time takes off my life,  
He'll take from off the other end!

*The Merry Maid*

Oh, I am grown so free from care  
    Since my heart broke!  
I set my throat against the air,  
    I laugh at simple folk!

There's little kind and little fair  
    Is worth its weight in smoke  
To me, that's grown so free from care  
    Since my heart broke!

Lass, if to sleep you would repair  
    As peaceful as you woke,  
Best not besiege your lover there  
    For just the words he spoke  
To me, that's grown so free from care  
    Since my heart broke!

*To Kathleen*

Still must the poet as of old,  
In barren attic bleak and cold,  
Starve, freeze, and fashion verses to  
Such things as flowers and song and you ;

Still as of old his being give  
In Beauty's name, while she may live,  
Beauty that may not die as long  
As there are flowers and you and song.

To S. M.

*(If He Should Lie A-dying)*

I am not willing you should go  
Into the earth, where Helen went;  
She is awake by now, I know.  
Where Cleopatra's anklets rust  
You will not lie with my consent;  
And Sappho is a roving dust;  
Cressid could love again; Dido,  
Rotted in state, is restless still;  
You leave me much against my will.

*The Philosopher*

And what are you that, wanting you,  
I should be kept awake  
As many nights as there are days  
With weeping for your sake?

And what are you that, missing you,  
As many days as crawl  
I should be listening to the wind  
And looking at the wall?

I know a man that's a braver man  
And twenty men as kind,  
And what are you, that you should be  
The one man in my mind?

Yet women's ways are witless ways,  
As any sage will tell,—  
And what am I, that I should love  
So wisely and so well?

From *THE HARP-WEAVER AND OTHER POEMS*

Y



*My Heart, Being Hungry*

My heart, being hungry, feeds on food

The fat of heart despise.

Beauty where beauty never stood,

And sweet where no sweet lies

I gather to my querulous need,

Having a growing heart to feed.

It may be, when my heart is dull,

Having attained its girth,

I shall not find so beautiful

The meagre shapes of earth,

Nor linger in the rain to mark

The smell of tansy through the dark.

*Autumn Chant*

Now the autumn shudders  
In the rose's root.  
Far and wide the ladders  
Lean among the fruit.

Now the autumn clambers  
Up the trellised frame,  
And the rose remembers  
The dust from which it came.

Brighter than the blossom  
On the rose's bough  
Sits the wizened, orange,  
Bitter berry now ;

Beauty never slumbers ;  
All is in her name ;  
But the rose remembers  
The dust from which it came.

*Nuit Blanche*

I am a shepherd of those sheep  
That climb a wall by night,  
One after one, until I sleep,  
Or the black pane goes white.  
Because of which I cannot see  
A flock upon a hill,  
But doubts come tittering up to me  
That should by day be still.  
And childish griefs I have outgrown  
Into my eyes are thrust,  
Till my dull tears go dropping down  
Like lead into the dust.

*Three Songs from "The Lamp and the Bell"*

I

Oh, little rose tree, bloom!  
Summer is nearly over.  
The dahlias bleed, and the phlox is seed.  
Nothing's left of the clover.  
And the path of the poppy no one knows.  
I would blossom if I were a rose.

Summer, for all your guile,  
Will brown in a week to Autumn,  
And launched leaves throw a shadow below  
Over the brook's clear bottom,—  
And the chariest bud the year can boast  
Be brought to bloom by the chastening frost.

## II

Beat me a crown of bluer metal;  
Fret it with stones of a foreign style:  
The heart grows weary after a little  
Of what it loved for a little while.

Weave me a robe of richer fibre;  
Pattern its web with a rare device:  
Give away to the child of a neighbour  
This gold gown I was glad in twice.

But buy me a singer to sing one song—  
Song about nothing—song about sheep—  
Over and over, all day long;  
Patch me again my thread-bare sleep.

### III

Rain comes down  
And hushes the town.  
And where is the voice that I heard crying?

Snow settles  
Over the nettles.  
Where is the voice that I heard crying?

Sand at last  
On the drifting mast.  
And where is the voice that I heard crying?

Earth now  
On the busy brow.  
And where is the voice that I heard crying?

*The Wood Road*

If I were to walk this way  
    Hand in hand with Grief,  
I should mark that maple-spray  
    Coming into leaf.  
I should note how the old burrs  
    Rot upon the ground.  
Yes, though Grief should know me hers  
    While the world goes round,  
It could not in truth be said  
    This was lost on me:  
A rock-maple showing red,  
    Burrs beneath a tree.

*Feast*

I drank at every vine.

The last was like the first.

I came upon no wine

So wonderful as thirst.

I gnawed at every root.

I ate of every plant.

I came upon no fruit

So wonderful as want.

Feed the grape and bean

To the vintner and monger ;

I will lie down lean

With my thirst and my hunger.

*Souvenir*

Just a rainy day or two  
In a windy tower,  
That was all I had of you—  
Saving half an hour

Marred by greeting passing groups  
In a cinder walk,  
Near some naked blackberry hoops  
Dim with purple chalk.

I remember three or four  
Things you said in spite,  
And an ugly coat you wore,  
Plaided black and white.

Just a rainy day or two  
And a bitter word.  
Why do I remember you  
As a singing bird?

*Scrub*

If I grow bitterly,  
Like a gnarled and stunted tree,  
Bearing harshly of my youth  
Puckered fruit that sears the mouth;  
If I make of my drawn boughs  
An inhospitable house,  
Out of which I never pry  
Towards the water and the sky,  
Under which I stand and hide  
And hear the day go by outside;  
It is that a wind too strong  
Bent my back when I was young,  
It is that I fear the rain  
Lest it blister me again.

*The Goose-Girl*

Spring rides no horses down the hill,  
But comes on foot, a goose-girl still.  
And all the loveliest things there be  
Come simply, so, it seems to me.  
If ever I said, in grief or pride,  
I tired of honest things, I lied;  
And should be cursed forevermore  
With Love in laces, like a whore,  
And neighbours cold, and friends unsteady,  
And Spring on horseback, like a lady!

*The Dragonfly*

I wound myself in a white cocoon of singing,  
All day long in the brook's uneven bed  
Measuring out my soul in a mucous thread;  
Dimly now to the brook's green bottom clinging,  
Men behold me, a worm spun-out and dead,  
Walled in an iron house of silky singing.

Nevertheless at length, O reedy shallows,  
Not as a plodding nose to the slimy stem,  
But as a brazen wing with a spangled hem,  
Over the jewel-weed and the pink marshmallows,  
Free of these and making a song of them,  
I shall arise, and a song of the reedy shallows!

## *Departure*

It's little I care what path I take,  
And where it leads it's little I care;  
But out of this house, lest my heart break,  
I must go, and off somewhere.

It's little I know what's in my heart,  
What's in my mind it's little I know,  
But there's that in me must up and start,  
And it's little I care where my feet go.

I wish I could walk for a day and a night,  
And find me at dawn in a desolate place  
With never the rut of a road in sight,  
Nor the roof of a house, nor the eyes of a face.

I wish I could walk till my blood should spout,  
And drop me, never to stir again,  
On a shore that is wide, for the tide is out,  
And the weedy rocks are bare to the rain.

But dump or dock, where the path I take  
Brings up, it's little enough I care;  
And it's little I'd mind the fuss they'll make,  
Huddled dead in a ditch somewhere.

*"Is something the matter, dear," she said,  
"That you sit at your work so silently?"  
"No, mother, no, 'twas a knot in my thread.  
There goes the kettle, I'll make the tea."*

*The Return from Town*

As I sat down by Saddle Stream  
To bathe my dusty feet there,  
A boy was standing on the bridge  
Any girl would meet there.

As I went over Woody Knob  
And dipped into the hollow,  
A youth was coming up the hill  
Any maid would follow.

Then in I turned at my own gate,—  
And nothing to be sad for—  
To such a man as any wife  
Would pass a pretty lad for.

*A Visit to the Asylum*

Once from a big, big building,  
When I was small, small,  
The queer folk in the windows  
Would smile at me and call.

And in the hard wee gardens  
Such pleasant men would hoe:  
“Sir, may we touch the little girl’s hair!” —  
It was so red, you know.

They cut me coloured asters  
With shears so sharp and neat,  
They brought me grapes and plums and pears  
And pretty cakes to eat.

And out of all the windows,  
No matter where we went,  
The merriest eyes would follow me  
And make me compliment.

There were a thousand windows,  
All latticed up and down.  
And up to all the windows,  
When we went back to town,

The queer folk put their faces,  
As gentle as could be;  
“Come again, little girl!” they called, and I  
Called back, “You come see me!”

*The Spring and the Fall*

In the spring of the year, in the spring of the year,  
I walked the road beside my dear.  
The trees were black where the bark was wet.  
I see them yet, in the spring of the year.  
He broke me a bough of the blossoming peach  
That was out of the way and hard to reach.

In the fall of the year, in the fall of the year,  
I walked the road beside my dear.  
The rooks went up with a raucous trill.  
I hear them still, in the fall of the year.  
He laughed at all I dared to praise,  
And broke my heart, in little ways.

Year be springing or year be falling,  
The bark will drip and the birds be calling.  
There's much that's fine to see and hear  
In the spring of a year, in the fall of a year.  
'Tis not love's going hurts my days,  
But that it went in little ways.

### *The Curse*

Oh, lay my ashes on the wind  
That blows across the sea.  
And I shall meet a fisherman  
Out of Capri,

And he will say, seeing me,  
“What a strange thing!  
Like a fish’s scale or a  
Butterfly’s wing.”

Oh, lay my ashes on the wind  
That blows away the fog.  
And I shall meet a farmer boy  
Leaping through the bog,

And he will say, seeing me,  
“What a strange thing!  
Like a peat-ash or a  
Butterfly’s wing.”

And I shall blow to your house  
And, sucked against the pane,  
See you take your sewing up  
And lay it down again.

And you will say, seeing me,  
“What a strange thing!  
Like a plum petal or a  
Butterfly’s wing.”

And none at all will know me  
That knew me well before.  
But I will settle at the root  
That climbs about your door,

And fishermen and farmers  
May see me and forget,  
But I’ll be a bitter berry  
In your brewing yet.

*Keen*

Weep him dead and mourn as you may,  
Me, I sing as I must :  
Blessèd be Death, that cuts in marble  
What would have sunk to dust !

Blessèd be Death, that took my love  
And buried him in the sea,  
Where never a lie nor a bitter word  
Will out of his mouth at me.

This I have to hold to my heart,  
This to take by the hand :  
Sweet we were for a summer month  
As the sun on the dry white sand ;

Mild we were for a summer month  
As the wind from over the weirs.  
And blessèd be Death, that hushed with salt  
The harsh and slovenly years !

Who builds her a house with love for timber  
Builds her a house of foam.  
And I'd rather be bride to a lad gone down  
Than widow to one safe home.

*The Betrothal*

Oh, come, my lad, or go, my lad,  
And love me if you like.  
I shall not hear the door shut  
Nor the knocker strike.

Oh, bring me gifts or beg me gifts,  
And wed me if you will.  
I'd make a man a good wife,  
Sensible and still.

And why should I be cold, my lad,  
And why should you repine,  
Because I love a dark head  
That never will be mine?

I might as well be easing you  
As lie alone in bed  
And waste the night in wanting  
A cruel dark head.

You might as well be calling yours  
What never will be his,  
And one of us be happy.  
There's few enough as is.

*Humoresque*

“Heaven bless the babe!” they said.

“What queer books she must have read!”

(Love, by whom I was beguiled,

Grant I may not bear a child.)

“Little does she guess to-day

What the world may be!” they say.

(Snow, drift deep and cover

Till the spring my murdered lover.)

*The Pond*

In this pond of placid water,  
Half a hundred years ago,  
So they say, a farmer's daughter,  
Jilted by her farmer beau,

Waded out among the rushes,  
Scattering the blue dragon-flies;  
That dried stick the ripple washes  
Marks the spot, I should surmise.

Think, so near the public highway,  
Well frequented even then!  
Can you not conceive the sly way,—  
Hearing wheels or seeing men

Passing on the road above,—  
With a gesture feigned and silly,  
Ere she drowned herself for love,  
She would reach to pluck a lily?

*The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver*

"Son," said my mother,  
When I was knee-high,  
"You've need of clothes to cover you,  
And not a rag have I.

"There's nothing in the house  
To make a boy breeches,  
Nor shears to cut a cloth with,  
Nor thread to take stitches.

"There's nothing in the house  
But a loaf-end of rye,  
And a harp with a woman's head  
Nobody will buy,"  
And she began to cry.

That was in the early fall.  
When came the late fall,

“Son,” she said, “the sight of you  
Makes your mother’s blood crawl,—

“Little skinny shoulder-blades  
Sticking through your clothes!  
And where you’ll get a jacket from  
God above knows.

“It’s lucky for me, lad,  
Your daddy’s in the ground,  
And can’t see the way I let  
His son go around!”  
And she made a queer sound.

That was in the late fall.  
When the winter came,  
I’d not a pair of breeches  
Nor a shirt to my name.

I couldn’t go to school,  
Or out of doors to play.

And all the other little boys  
Passed our way.

“Son,” said my mother,  
“Come, climb into my lap,  
And I’ll chafe your little bones  
While you take a nap.”

And, oh, but we were silly  
For half an hour or more,  
Me with my long legs  
Dragging on the floor,

A-rock-rock-rocking  
To a mother-goose rhyme!  
Oh, but we were happy  
For half an hour’s time!

But there was I, a great boy,  
And what would folks say  
To hear my mother singing me  
To sleep all day,  
In such a daft way?

Men say the winter  
Was bad that year ;  
Fuel was scarce,  
And food was dear.

A wind with a wolf's head  
Howled about our door,  
And we burned up the chairs  
And sat upon the floor.

All that was left us  
Was a chair we couldn't break,  
And the harp with a woman's head  
Nobody would take,  
For song or pity's sake.

The night before Christmas  
I cried with the cold,  
I cried myself to sleep  
Like a two-year-old.

And in the deep night  
I felt my mother rise,  
And stare down upon me  
With love in her eyes.

I saw my mother sitting  
On the one good chair,  
A light falling on her  
From I couldn't tell where,

Looking nineteen,  
And not a day older,  
And the harp with a woman's head  
Leaned against her shoulder.

Her thin fingers, moving  
In the thin, tall strings,  
Were weav-weav-weaving  
Wonderful things.

Many bright threads,  
From where I couldn't see,

Were running through the harp-strings  
Rapidly,

And gold threads whistling  
Through my mother's hand.  
I saw the web grow,  
And the pattern expand.

She wove a child's jacket,  
And when it was done  
She laid it on the floor  
And wove another one.

She wove a red cloak  
So regal to see,  
"She's made it for a king's son,"  
I said, "and not for me."  
But I knew it was for me.

She wove a pair of breeches  
Quicker than that!  
She wove a pair of boots  
And a little cocked hat.

She wove a pair of mittens,  
    She wove a little blouse,  
She wove all night  
    In the still, cold house.

She sang as she worked,  
    And the harp-strings spoke;  
Her voice never faltered,  
    And the thread never broke.  
And when I awoke,—

There sat my mother  
    With the harp against her shoulder,  
Looking nineteen,  
    And not a day older,

A smile about her lips,  
    And a light about her head,  
And her hands in the harp-strings  
    Frozen dead.

And piled up beside her  
And toppling to the skies,  
Were the clothes of a king's son,  
Just my size.

*Never May the Fruit Be Plucked*

Never, never may the fruit be plucked from the bough  
And gathered into barrels.  
He that would eat of love must eat it where it hangs.  
Though the branches bend like reeds,  
Though the ripe fruit splash in the grass or wrinkle on the tree,  
He that would eat of love may bear away with him  
Only what his belly can hold,  
Nothing in the apron,  
Nothing in the pockets.  
Never, never may the fruit be gathered from the bough  
And harvested in barrels.  
The winter of love is a cellar of empty bins,  
In an orchard soft with rot.

*The Concert*

No, I will go alone.  
I will come back when it's over.  
Yes, of course I love you.  
No, it will not be long.  
Why may you not come with me?—  
You are too much my lover.  
You would put yourself  
Between me and song.

If I go alone,  
Quiet and suavely clothed,  
My body will die in its chair,  
And over my head a flame,  
A mind that is twice my own,  
Will mark with icy mirth  
The wise advance and retreat  
Of armies without a country,  
Storming a nameless gate,  
Hurling terrible javelins down  
From the shouting walls of a singing town

Where no women wait!  
Armies clean of love and hate,  
Marching lines of pitiless sound  
Climbing hills to the sun and hurling  
Golden spears to the ground!  
Up the lines a silver runner  
Bearing a banner whereon is scored  
The milk and steel of a bloodless wound  
Healed at length by the sword!

You and I have nothing to do with music.  
We may not make of music a filigree frame,  
Within which you and I,  
Tenderly glad we came,  
Sit smiling, hand in hand.

Come now, be content.  
I will come back to you, I swear I will;  
And you will know me still.  
I shall be only a little taller  
Than when I went.

*Hyacinth*

I am in love with him to whom a hyacinth is dearer  
Than I shall ever be dear.

On nights when the field-mice are abroad he cannot sleep:  
He hears their narrow teeth at the bulbs of his hyacinths.  
But the gnawing at my heart he does not hear.

*To One Who Might Have Borne a Message*

Had I known that you were going  
I would have given you messages for her,  
Now two years dead,  
Whom I shall always love.

As it is, should she entreat you how it goes with me,  
You must reply: as well as with most, you fancy;  
That I love easily, and pass the time.

And she will not know how all day long between  
My life and me her shadow intervenes,  
A young thin girl,  
Wearing a white skirt and a purple sweater  
And a narrow pale blue ribbon about her hair.

I used to say to her, "I love you  
Because your face is such a pretty color,  
No other reason."

But it was not true.

Oh, had I only known that you were going,  
I could have given you messages for her!

*Siege*

This I do, being mad:  
Gather baubles about me,  
Sit in a circle of toys, and all the time  
Death beating the door in.

*White jade and an orange pitcher,  
Hindu idol, Chinese god,—  
Maybe next year, when I'm richer—  
Carved beads and a lotus pod. . . .*

And all this time  
Death beating the door in.

## *The Cairn*

When I think of the little children learning  
In all the schools of the world,  
Learning in Danish, learning in Japanese  
That two and two are four, and where the rivers of the world  
Rise, and the names of the mountains and the principal cities,  
My heart breaks.

Come up, children! Toss your little stones gaily  
On the great cairn of Knowledge!  
(Where lies what Euclid knew, a little grey stone,  
What Plato, what Pascal, what Galileo:  
Little grey stones, little grey stones on a cairn.)  
Tell me, what is the name of the highest mountain?  
Name me a crater of fire! a peak of snow!  
Name me the mountains on the moon!  
But the name of the mountain that you climb all day,  
Ask not your teacher that.

## *Spring Song*

I know why the yellow forsythia  
Holds its breath and will not bloom,  
And the robin thrusts his beak in his wing.

Want me to tell you? Think you can bear it?  
Cover your eyes with your hand and hear it.  
You know how cold the days are still?  
And everybody saying how late the Spring is?  
Well—cover your eyes with your hand—the thing is,  
There isn't going to be any Spring.

*No parking here! No parking here!*  
*They said to Spring: No parking here!*

Spring came on as she always does,  
Laid her hand on the yellow forsythia,—  
Little boys turned in their sleep and smiled,  
Dreaming of marbles, dreaming of agates;  
Little girls leapt from their beds to see  
Spring come by with her painted wagons,  
Coloured wagons creaking with wonder—

Laid her hand on the robin's throat ;  
When up comes you-know-who, my dear,  
You-know-who in a fine blue coat,  
And says to Spring: No parking here!

*No parking here! No parking here!*  
*Move on! Move on! No parking here!*

Come walk with me in the city gardens.  
(Better keep an eye out for you-know-who)  
Did ever you see such a sickly showing?—  
Middle of June, and nothing growing;  
The gardeners peer and scratch their heads  
And drop their sweat on the tulip-beds,  
But not a blade thrusts through.

*Come, move on! Don't you know how to walk?*  
*No parking here! And no back-talk!*

Oh, well,—hell, it's all for the best.  
She certainly made a lot of clutter,  
Dropping petals under the trees,  
Taking your mind off your bread and butter.

Anyhow, it's nothing to me.

I can remember, and so can you.

(Though we'd better watch out for you-know-who,  
When we sit around remembering Spring).

We shall hardly notice in a year or two.

You can get accustomed to anything.

## *Memory of Cape Cod*

The wind in the ash-tree sounds like surf on the shore at Truro.  
I will shut my eyes . . . hush, be still with your silly bleating,  
sheep on Shillingstone Hill . . .

*They said: Come along! They said: Leave your pebbles on the sand and come  
along, it's long after sunset!*

*The mosquitoes will be thick in the pine-woods along by Long Nook, the wind's  
died down!*

*They said: Leave your pebbles on the sand, and your shells, too, and come along,  
we'll find you another beach like the beach at Truro.*

Let me listen to wind in the ash . . . it sounds like surf on the  
shore.

From *THE BUCK IN THE SNOW*

Y



*Moriturus*

If I could have  
Two things in one:  
The peace of the grave,  
And the light of the sun;

My hands across  
My thin breast-bone,  
But aware of the moss  
Invading the stone,

Aware of the flight  
Of the golden flicker  
With his wing to the light;  
To hear him nicker

And drum with his bill  
On the rotted willow;  
Snug and still  
On a grey pillow

Deep in the clay  
Where digging is hard,  
Out of the way,—  
The blue shard

Of a broken platter—  
If I might be  
Insensate matter  
With sensate me

Sitting within,  
Harking and prying,  
I might begin  
To dicker with dying.

For the body at best  
Is a bundle of aches,  
Longing for rest;  
It cries when it wakes

“Alas, 'tis light!”  
At set of sun

“Alas, ’tis night,  
And nothing done!”

Death, however,  
Is a spongy wall,  
Is a sticky river,  
Is nothing at all.

Summon the weeper,  
Wail and sing;  
Call him Reaper,  
Angel, King;

Call him Evil  
Drunk to the lees,  
Monster, Devil,—  
He is less than these.

Call him Thief,  
The Maggot in the Cheese,  
The Canker in the Leaf,—  
He is less than these.

Dusk without sound,  
Where the spirit by pain  
Uncoiled, is wound  
To spring again ;

The mind enmeshed  
Laid straight in repose,  
And the body refreshed  
By feeding the rose,—

These are but visions ;  
These would be  
The grave's derisions,  
Could the grave see.

Here is the wish  
Of one that died  
Like a beached fish  
On the ebb of the tide:

That he might wait  
Till the tide came back,

To see if a crate,  
Or a bottle, or a black

Boot, or an oar,  
Or an orange peel  
Be washed ashore. . . .  
About his heel

The sand slips;  
The last he hears  
From the world's lips  
Is the sand in his ears.

What thing is little?—  
The aphis hid  
In a house of spittle?  
The hinge of the lid

Of the spider's eye  
At the spider's birth?  
"Greater am I  
By the earth's girth

Than Mighty Death!"  
All creatures cry  
That can summon breath;—  
And speak no lie.

For He is nothing;  
He is less  
Than Echo answering  
"Nothingness!"—

Less than the heat  
Of the furthest star  
To the ripening wheat;  
Less by far,

When all the lipping  
Is said and sung,  
Than the sweat dripping  
From a dog's tongue.

This being so,  
And I being such,

I would liever go  
On a cripple's crutch,

Lopped and felled;  
Liever be dependent  
On a chair propelled  
By a surly attendant

With a foul breath,  
And be spooned my food,  
Than go with Death  
Where nothing good,

Not even the thrust  
Of the summer gnat,  
Consoles the dust  
For being that.

Needy, lonely,  
Stitched by pain,  
Left with only  
The drip of the rain

Out of all I had ;  
The books of the wise,  
Badly read  
By other eyes,

Lewdly bawled  
At my closing ear ;  
Hated, called  
A lingerer here ;—

Withstanding Death  
Till Life be gone,  
I shall treasure my breath,  
I shall linger on.

I shall bolt my door  
With a bolt and a cable ;  
I shall block my door  
With a bureau and a table ;

With all my might  
My door shall be barred.

I shall put up a fight,  
I shall take it hard.

With his hand on my mouth  
He shall drag me forth,  
Shrieking to the south  
And clutching at the north.

*Song*

Gone, gone again is Summer the lovely.  
    She that knew not where to hide,  
Is gone again like a jeweled fish from the hand,  
    Is lost on every side.

Mute, mute, I make my way to the garden,  
    Thither where she last was seen ;  
The heavy foot of the frost is on the flags there,  
    Where her light step has been.

Gone, gone again is Summer the lovely,  
    Gone again on every side,  
Lost again like a shining fish from the hand  
    Into the shadowy tide.

*To the Wife of a Sick Friend*

Shelter this candle from the wind.  
Hold it steady. In its light  
The cave wherein we wander lost  
Glitters with frosty stalactite,  
Blossoms with mineral rose and lotus,  
Sparkles with crystal moon and star,  
Till a man would rather be lost than found:  
We have forgotten where we are.

Shelter this candle. Shrewdly blowing  
Down the cave from a secret door  
Enters our only foe, the wind.  
Hold it steady. Lest we stand,  
Each in a sudden, separate dark,  
The hot wax spattered upon your hand,  
The smoking wick in my nostrils strong,  
The inner eyelid red and green  
For a moment yet with moons and roses,—  
Then the unmitigated dark.

Alone, alone, in a terrible place,  
In utter dark without a face,  
With only the dripping of the water on the stone,  
And the sound of your tears, and the taste of my own.

*The Bobolink*

Black bird scudding  
Under the rainy sky,  
How wet your wings must be!  
And your small head how sleek and cold with water.

Oh, Bobolink, 'tis you!  
Over the buffeted orchard in the summer draught,  
Chuckling and singing, charging the rainy cloud,  
A little bird gone daft,  
A little bird with a secret.

Only the bobolink on the rainy  
Rhubarb blossom,  
Knows my heart. . . .  
For whom adversity has not a word to say that can be heard  
Above the din of summer.  
The rain has taught us nothing. And the hooves of cattle, and  
the cat in the grass  
Have taught us nothing.

The hawk that motionless above the hill  
In the pure sky  
Stands like a blackened planet  
Has taught us nothing,—seeing him shut his wings and fall  
Has taught us nothing at all.  
In the shadow of the hawk we feather our nests.

Bobolink, you and I, an airy fool and an earthy,  
Chuckling under the rain!

*I shall never be sad again.*

*I shall never be sad again.*

Ah, sweet, absurd,  
Belovèd, bedraggled bird!

## *The Hawkweed*

Between the red-top and the rye,  
Between the buckwheat and the corn,  
The ploughman sees with sullen eye  
The hawkweed licking at the sky:

Three level acres all forlorn,  
Unfertile, sour, outrun, outworn,  
Free as the day that they were born.

Southward and northward, west and east,  
The sulphate and the lime are spread;  
Harrowed and sweetened, urged, increased,  
The furrow sprouts for man and beast:

While of the hawkweed's radiant head  
No stanchion reeks, no stock is fed.

Triumphant up the taken field  
The tractor and the plough advance;  
Blest be the healthy germ concealed  
In the rich earth, and blest the yield:

And blest be Beauty, that enchants  
The frail, the solitary lance.

*To a Friend Estranged from Me*

Now goes under, and I watch it go under, the sun  
That will not rise again.

Today has seen the setting, in your eyes cold and senseless as the sea,  
Of friendship better than bread, and of bright charity  
That lifts a man a little above the beasts that run.

That this could be!

That I should live to see

Most vulgar Pride, that stale obstreperous clown,

So fitted out with purple robe and crown

To stand among his betters! Face to face

With outraged me in this once holy place,

Where Wisdom was a favoured guest and hunted

Truth was harboured out of danger,

He bulks enthroned, a lewd, an insupportable stranger!

I would have sworn, indeed I swore it:

The hills may shift, the waters may decline,

Winter may twist the stem from the twig that bore it,

But never your love from me, your hand from mine.

Now goes under the sun, and I watch it go under.

Farewell, sweet light, great wonder!

You, too, farewell,—but fare not well enough to dream

You have done wisely to invite the night before the darkness  
came.

*The Road to Avrillé*

April again in Avrillé,  
And the brown lark in air.  
And you and I a world apart,  
That walked together there.

The cuckoo spoke from out the wood,  
The lark from out the sky.  
Embraced upon the highway stood  
Love-sick you and I.

The rosy peasant left his bees,  
The carrier slowed his cart,  
To shout us blithe obscenities,  
And bless us from the heart,

Who long before the year was out,  
Under the autumn rain,  
Far from the road to Avrillé,  
Parted with little pain.

*For Pao-Chin, a Boatman on the Yellow Sea*

Where is he now, in his soiled shirt reeking of garlic,  
Sculling his sampan home, and night approaching fast—  
The red sail hanging wrinkled on the bamboo mast;

Where is he now, I shall remember my whole life long  
With love and praise, for the sake of a small song  
Played on a Chinese flute?

I have been sad;

I have been in cities where the song was all I had,—  
A treasure never to be bartered by the hungry days.

Where is he now, for whom I carry in my heart  
This love, this praise?

*Northern April*

O mind, beset by music never for a moment quiet,—  
The wind at the flue, the wind strumming the shutter;  
The soft, antiphonal speech of the doubled brook, never for a  
moment quiet;  
The rush of the rain against the glass, his voice in the eaves-  
gutter!

Where shall I lay you to sleep, and the robins be quiet?  
Lay you to sleep—and the frogs be silent in the marsh?  
Crashes the sleet from the bough and the bough sighs upward,  
never for a moment quiet.  
April is upon us, pitiless and young and harsh.

O April, full of blood, full of breath, have pity upon us!  
Pale, where the winter like a stone has been lifted away, we  
emerge like yellow grass.  
Be for a moment quiet, buffet us not, have pity upon us,  
Till the green come back into the vein, till the giddiness pass.

*There at Dusk I Found You*

There at dusk I found you, walking and weeping  
Upon the broken flags,  
Where at dusk the dumb white nicotine awakes and utters her  
    fragrance  
In a garden sleeping.

Looking askance you said:  
Love is dead.

Under our eyes without warning softly the summer afternoon  
    let fall  
The rose upon the wall,  
And it lay there splintered.  
Terribly then into my heart the forgotten anguish entered.

I saw the dark stone on the smallest finger of your hand,  
And the clean cuff above.  
No more, no more the dark stone on the smallest finger  
Of your brown and naked arm,  
Lifting my body in love!

Worse than dead is he of the wounded wing,  
Who walks between us, weeping upon the cold flags,  
Bleeding and weeping, dragging his broken wing.  
He has gathered the rose into his hand and chafed her with his  
breath.

But the rose is quiet and pale. She has forgotten us all.  
Even spring.  
Even death.

As for me, I have forgotten nothing,—nor shall I ever forget—  
But this one thing:  
I have forgotten which of us it was  
That hurt his wing.  
I only know his limping flight above us in the blue air  
Toward the sunset cloud  
Is more than I can bear.

You, you there,  
Stiff-necked and angry, holding up your head so proud,  
Have you not seen how pitiful lame he flies, and none to befriend  
him?

Speak! Are you blind? Are you dead?  
Shall we call him back? Shall we mend him?

*Being Young and Green*

Being young and green, I said in love's despite:  
Never in the world will I to living wight  
Give over, air my mind  
To anyone,  
Hang out its ancient secrets in the strong wind  
To be shredded and faded. . . .

Oh, me, invaded  
And sacked by the wind and the sun!

*Mist in the Valley*

These hills, to hurt me more,  
That am hurt already enough,—  
Having left the sea behind,  
Having turned suddenly and left the shore  
That I had loved beyond all words, even a song's words, to convey,

And built me a house on upland acres,  
Sweet with the pinxter, bright and rough  
With the rusty blackbird long before the winter's done,  
But smelling never of bayberry hot in the sun,  
Nor ever loud with the pounding of the long white breakers,—

These hills, beneath the October moon,  
Sit in the valley white with mist  
Like islands in a quiet bay,

Jut out from shore into the mist,  
Wooded with poplar dark as pine,  
Like points of land into a quiet bay.

(Just in that way  
The harbour met the bay)

Stricken too sore for tears,  
I stand, remembering the islands and the sea's lost sound. . . .  
Life at its best no longer than the sand-peep's cry,  
And I two years, two years,  
Tilling an upland ground!

*The Hardy Garden*

Now let forever the phlox and the rose be tended  
Here where the rain has darkened and the sun has dried  
So many times the terrace, yet is love unended,  
    Love has not died.

Let here no seed of a season, that the winter  
But once assails, take root and for a time endure;  
But only such as harbour at the frozen centre  
    The germ secure.

Set here the phlox and the iris, and establish  
Pink and valerian, and the great and lesser bells;  
But suffer not the sisters of the year, to publish  
    That frost prevails.

How far from home in a world of mortal burdens  
Is Love, that may not die, and is forever young!  
Set roses here: surround her only with such maidens  
    As speak her tongue.

## *The Pigeons*

Well I remember the pigeons in the sunny arbor  
Beyond your open door;  
How they conversed throughout the afternoon in their monotonous voices never for a moment still;  
Always of yesterday they spoke, and of the days before,  
Rustling the vine-leaves, twitching the dark shadows of the leaves on the bright sill.

You said, the soft curring and droning of the pigeons in the vine  
Was a pretty thing enough to the passer-by,  
But a maddening thing to a man with his head in his hands,—  
“Like mine! Like mine!”  
You said, and ran to the door and waved them off into the sky.

They did not come back. The arbor was empty of their cooing.  
The shadows of the leaves were still. “Whither have they flown, then?”

I said, and waited for their wings, but they did not come back.  
If I had known then  
What I know now, I never would have left your door.

Tall in your faded smock, with steady hand  
Mingling the brilliant pigments, painting your intersecting  
planes you stand,  
In a quiet room, empty of the past, of its droning and cooing,  
Thinking I know not what, but thinking of me no more,  
That left you with a light word, that loving and rueing  
Walk in the streets of a city you have never seen,  
Walk in a noise of yesterday and of the days before,  
Walk in a cloud of wings intolerable, shutting out the sun as if  
it never had been.

*The Buck in the Snow*

White sky, over the hemlocks bowed with snow,  
Saw you not at the beginning of evening the antlered buck and  
his doe

Standing in the apple-orchard? I saw them. I saw them suddenly  
go,

Tails up, with long leaps lovely and slow,  
Over the stone-wall into the wood of hemlocks bowed with snow.

Now lies he here, his wild blood scalding the snow.

How strange a thing is death, bringing to his knees, bringing to  
his antlers

The buck in the snow.

How strange a thing,—a mile away by now, it may be,  
Under the heavy hemlocks that as the moments pass  
Shift their loads a little, letting fall a feather of snow—  
Life, looking out attentive from the eyes of the doe.

*The Anguish*

I would to God I were quenched and fed  
As in my youth  
From the flask of song, and the good bread  
Of beauty richer than truth.

The anguish of the world is on my tongue.  
My bowl is filled to the brim with it ; there is more than I can eat.  
Happy are the toothless old and the toothless young,  
That cannot rend this meat.

*Justice Denied in Massachusetts*

Let us abandon then our gardens and go home  
And sit in the sitting-room.  
Shall the larkspur blossom or the corn grow under this cloud?  
Sour to the fruitful seed  
Is the cold earth under this cloud,  
Fostering quack and weed, we have marched upon but cannot  
conquer;  
We have bent the blades of our hoes against the stalks of them.

Let us go home, and sit in the sitting-room.  
Not in our day  
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as before,  
Beneficent upon us  
Out of the glittering bay,  
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea  
Moving the blades of corn  
With a peaceful sound.  
Forlorn, forlorn,  
Stands the blue hay-rack by the empty mow.  
And the petals drop to the ground,

Leaving the tree unfruited.

The sun that warmed our stooping backs and withered the weed  
uprooted—

We shall not feel it again.

We shall die in darkness, and be buried in the rain.

What from the splendid dead

We have inherited—

Furrows sweet to the grain, and the weed subdued—

See now the slug and the mildew plunder.

Evil does overwhelm

The larkspur and the corn;

We have seen them go under.

Let us sit here, sit still,

Here in the sitting-room until we die;

At the step of Death on the walk, rise and go;

Leaving to our children's children this beautiful doorway,

And this elm,

And a blighted earth to till

With a broken hoe.

### *Hangman's Oak*

Before the cock in the barnyard spoke,  
    Before it well was day,  
Horror like a serpent from about the Hangman's Oak  
    Uncoiled and slid away.

Pity and Peace were on the limb  
    That bore such bitter fruit.  
Deep he lies, and the desperate blood of him  
    Befriends the innocent root.

Brother, I said to the air beneath the bough  
    Whence he had swung,  
It will not be long for any of us now ;  
    We do not grow young.

It will not be long for the knotter of ropes, not long  
    For the sheriff or for me,  
Or for any of them that came five hundred strong  
    To see you swing from a tree.

Side by side together in the belly of Death

We sit without hope,

You, and I, and the mother that gave you breath,

And the tree, and the rope.

*Wine from These Grapes*

Wine from these grapes I shall be treading surely  
Morning and noon and night until I die.  
Stained with these grapes I shall lie down to die.

If you would speak with me on any matter,  
At any time, come where these grapes are grown;  
And you will find me treading them to must.  
Lean then above me sagely, lest I spatter  
Drops of the wine I tread from grapes and dust.

Stained with these grapes I shall lie down to die.  
Three women come to wash me clean  
Shall not erase this stain.  
Nor leave me lying purely,  
Awaiting the black lover.  
Death, fumbling to uncover  
My body in his bed,  
Shall know  
There has been one  
Before him.

*To Those Without Pity*

Cruel of heart, lay down my song.  
Your reading eyes have done me wrong.  
Not for you was the pen bitten,  
And the mind wrung, and the song written.

*Dawn*

All men are lonely now.  
This is the hour when no man has a friend.  
Memory and Faith suspend  
From their spread wings above a cool abyss.  
All friendships end.

He that lay awake  
All night  
For sweet love's unregenerate sake,  
Sleeps in the grey light.

The lover, if he dream at all,  
Dreams not of her whose languid hand sleeps open at his side;  
He is gone to another bride.  
And she he leaves behind  
Sighs not in sleep "Unkind . . . unkind . . .";  
She walks in a garden of yellow quinces;  
Smiling, she gathers yellow quinces in a basket  
Of willow and laurel combined.

Should I return to your door,  
Fresh and haggard out of the morning air,  
There would be darkness on the stair,  
And a dead close odor painfully sad,  
That was not there before.  
There would be silence. There would be heavy steps across the  
floor.  
And you would let me in, frowning with sleep  
Under your rumpled hair.

Beautiful now upon the ear unshut by slumber  
The rich and varied voices of the waking day!—  
The mighty, mournful whistles without number  
Of tugs and ferries, mingling, confounding, failing,  
Thinning to separate notes of wailing,  
Making stupendous music on the misty bay.

Now through the echoing street in the growing light,  
Intent on errands that the sun approves,  
Clatter unashamed the heavy wheels and hooves  
Before the silent houses; briskly they say:  
“Marshal not me among the enterprises of the night.  
I am the beginning of the day.”

*To a Young Girl*

Shall I despise you that your colourless tears  
Made rainbows in your lashes, and you forgot to weep?  
Would we were half so wise, that eke a grief out  
By sitting in the dark, until we fall asleep.

I only fear lest, being by nature sunny,  
By and by you will weep no more at all,  
And fall asleep in the light, having lost with the tears  
The colour in the lashes that comes as the tears fall.

I would not have you darken your lids with weeping,  
Beautiful eyes, but I would have you weep enough  
To wet the fingers of the hand held over the eye-lids,  
And stain a little the light frock's delicate stuff.

For there came into my mind, as I watched you winking the tears  
down,  
Laughing faces, blown from the west and the east,  
Faces lovely and proud that I have prized and cherished;  
Nor were the loveliest among them those that had wept the least.

*Evening on Lesbos*

Twice having seen your shingled heads adorable  
Side by side, the onyx and the gold,  
I know that I have had what I could not hold.

Twice have I entered the room, not knowing she was here.  
Two agate eyes, two eyes of malachite,  
Twice have been turned upon me, hard and bright.

Whereby I know my loss.

Oh, not restorable

Sweet incense, mounting in the windless night!

*Dirge Without Music*

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the  
hard ground.

So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:  
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned  
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.  
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.  
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,  
A formula, a phrase remains,—but the best is lost.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter, the  
love,—  
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and  
curled  
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not  
approve.  
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the  
world.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave  
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;  
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.  
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

*Memory of Cassis*

Do you recall how we sat by the smokily-burning  
Twisted odorous trunk of the olive-tree,  
In the inn on the cliff, and skinned the ripe green figs,  
And heard the white sirocco driving in the sea?

The thunder and the smother there where like a ship's prow  
The light-house breasted the wave? how wanly through the wild  
    spray  
Under our peering eyes the eye of the light looked out,  
Disheveled, but without dismay?

Do you recall the sweet-alyssum over the ledges  
Crawling and the tall heather and the mushrooms under the pines,  
And the deep white dust of the broad road leading outward  
To a world forgotten, between the dusty almonds and the dusty  
    vines?

*Portrait*

Over and over I have heard,  
As now I hear it,  
Your voice harsh and light as the scratching of dry leaves over  
the hard ground,  
Your voice forever assailed and shaken by the wind from the  
island  
Of illustrious living and dead, that never dies down,  
And bending at moments under the terrible weight of the perfect  
word,  
Here in this room without fire, without comfort of any kind,  
Reading aloud to me immortal page after page conceived in a  
mortal mind.  
Beauty at such moments before me like a wild bright bird  
Has been in the room, and eyed me, and let me come near it.

I could not ever nor can I to this day  
Acquaint you with the triumph and the sweet rest  
These hours have brought to me and always bring,—  
Rapture, coloured like the wild bird's neck and wing,  
Comfort, softer than the feathers of its breast.

Always, and even now, when I rise to go,  
Your eyes blaze out from a face gone wickedly pale;  
I try to tell you what I would have you know,—  
What peace it was; you cry me down; you scourge me with a  
    salty flail;  
You will not have it so.

## *Winter Night*

Pile high the hickory and the light  
Log of chestnut struck by the blight.  
Welcome-in the winter night.

The day has gone in hewing and felling,  
Sawing and drawing wood to the dwelling  
For the night of talk and story-telling.

These are the hours that give the edge  
To the blunted axe and the bent wedge,  
Straighten the saw and lighten the sledge.

Here are question and reply,  
And the fire reflected in the thinking eye.  
So peace, and let the bob-cat cry.

### *The Cameo*

Forever over now, forever, forever gone  
That day. Clear and diminished like a scene  
Carven in cameo, the lighthouse, and the cove between  
The sandy cliffs, and the boat drawn up on the beach;  
And the long skirt of a lady innocent and young,  
Her hand resting on her bosom, her head hung;  
And the figure of a man in earnest speech.

Clear and diminished like a scene cut in cameo  
The lighthouse, and the boat on the beach, and the two shapes  
Of the woman and the man; lost like the lost day  
Are the words that passed, and the pain,—discarded, cut away  
From the stone, as from the memory the heat of the tears escapes.

O troubled forms, O early love unfortunate and hard,  
Time has estranged you into a jewel cold and pure;  
From the action of the waves and from the action of sorrow for-  
ever secure,  
White against a ruddy cliff you stand, chalcedony on sard.

*Counting-out Rhyme*

Silver bark of beech, and sallow  
Bark of yellow birch and yellow  
    Twig of willow.

Stripe of green in moosewood maple,  
Colour seen in leaf of apple,  
    Bark of popple.

Wood of popple pale as moonbeam,  
Wood of oak for yoke and barn-beam,  
    Wood of hornbeam.

Silver bark of beech, and hollow  
Stem of elder, tall and yellow  
    Twig of willow.

*The Plum Gatherer*

The angry nettle and the mild  
Grew together under the blue-plum trees.  
I could not tell as a child  
Which was my friend of these.

Always the angry nettle in the skirt of his sister  
Caught my wrist that reached over the ground,  
Where alike I gathered,—for the one was sweet and the other  
wore a frosty dust—  
The broken plum and the sound.

The plum-trees are barren now and the black knot is upon them,  
That stood so white in the spring.  
I would give, to recall the sweetness and the frost of the lost blue  
plums,  
Anything, anything.  
I thrust my arm among the grey ambiguous nettles, and wait.  
But they do not sting.

*West Country Song*

Sun came up, bigger than all my sorrow ;  
Lark in air so high, and his song clean through me.  
Now comes night, hushing the lark in's furrow,  
    And the rain falls fine.  
What have I done with what was dearest to me?

Thatch and wick, fagot, and tea on trivet,—  
These and more it was ; it was all my cheer.  
Now comes night, smelling of box and privet,  
    And the rain falls fine.  
Have I left it out in the rain ?—It is not here.

*Pueblo Pot*

There as I bent above the broken pot from the mesa pueblo,  
Mournfully many times its patterned shards piecing together and  
    laying aside,  
Appeared upon the house-top, two Navajos enchanted, the red-  
    shafted flicker and his bride,  
And stepped with lovely stride  
To the pergola, flashing the wonder of their underwings;  
There stood, mysterious and harsh and sleek,  
Wrenching the indigo berry from the shedding woodbine with  
    strong ebony beak.

His head without a crest  
Wore the red full moon for crown;  
The black new moon was crescent on the breast of each;  
From the bodies of both a visible heat beat down,  
And from the motion of their necks a shadow would fly and fall,  
Skimming the court and in the yellow adobe wall  
Cleaving a blue breach.

Powerful was the beauty of these birds.  
It boomed like a struck bell in the silence deep and hot.  
I stooped above the shattered clay; passionately I cried to the  
    beauty of these birds,  
“Solace the broken pot!”

The beauty of these birds  
Opened its lips to speak;  
Colours were its words,  
The scarlet shaft on the grey cheek,  
The purple berry in the ebony beak.  
It said, “I cannot console  
The broken thing; I can only make it whole.”

Wisdom, heretic flower, I was ever afraid  
Of your large, cool petals without scent!  
Shocked, betrayed,  
I turned to the comfort of grief, I bent  
Above the lovely shards.  
But their colours had faded in the fierce light of the birds.  
And as for the birds, they were gone. As suddenly as they had  
    come, they went.

*When Caesar Fell*

When Caesar fell, where yellow Tiber rolls  
    Its heavy waters muddy,  
Life, that was ebbing from a hundred holes  
    In Caesar's body,  
Cried with a hundred voices to the common air,  
    The unimperial day,  
"Gather me up, oh, pour me into the veins of even a gilder of  
    hair!  
Let me not vanish away!"

The teeth of Caesar at the ignoble word  
    Were ground together in pride;  
No sound came from his lips: the world has heard  
    How Caesar died.  
In the Roman dust the cry of Caesar's blood  
    Was heard and heard without wonder  
Only by the fly that swam in the red flood  
    Till his head went under.

*Lethe*

Ah, drink again  
This river that is the taker-away of pain,  
And the giver-back of beauty!

In these cool waves  
What can be lost?—  
Only the sorry cost  
Of the lovely thing, ah, never the thing itself!

The level flood that laves  
The hot brow  
And the stiff shoulder  
Is at our temples now.

Gone is the fever,  
But not into the river;  
Melted the frozen pride,  
But the tranquil tide  
Runs never the warmer for this,  
Never the colder.

Immerse the dream.

Drench the kiss.

Dip the song in the stream.

*On First Having Heard the Skylark*

Not knowing he rose from earth, not having seen him rise,  
Not knowing the fallow furrow was his home,  
And that high wing, untouchable, untainted,  
A wing of earth, with the warm loam  
Closely acquainted,  
I shuddered at his cry and caught my heart.  
Relentless out of heaven his sweet crying like a crystal dart  
Was launched against me. Scanning the empty sky  
I stood with thrown-back head until the world reeled.  
Still, still he sped his unappeasable shafts against my breast with-  
out a shield.  
He cried forever from his unseen throat  
Between me and the sun.  
He would not end his singing, he would not have done.  
“Serene and pitiless note, whence, whence are you?”  
I cried. “Alas, these arrows, how fast they fall!  
Ay, me, beset by angels in unequal fight,  
Alone high on the shaven down surprised, and not a tree in sight!”

Even as I spoke he was revealed  
Above me in the bright air,  
A dark articulate atom in the mute enormous blue,  
A mortal bird, flying and singing in the morning there.  
Even as I spoke I spied him, and I knew,  
And called him by his name;  
“Blithe Spirit!” I cried. Transfixed by more than mortal spears  
I fell; I lay among the foreign daisies pink and small,  
And wept, staining their innocent faces with fast-flowing tears.

*To a Musician*

Who, now, when evening darkens the water and the stream is dull,  
Slowly, in a delicate frock, with her leghorn hat in her hand,  
At your side from under the golden osiers moves,  
Faintly smiling, shattered by the charm of your voice?

There, today, as in the days when I knew you well,  
The willow sheds upon the stream its narrow leaves,  
And the quiet flowing of the water and its faint smell  
Are balm to the heart that grieves.

Together with the sharp discomfort of loving you,  
Ineffable you, so lovely and so aloof,  
There is laid upon the spirit the calmness of the river view:  
Together they fall, the pain and its reproof.

Who, now, under the yellow willows at the water's edge  
Closes defeated lips upon the trivial word unspoken,  
And lifts her soft eyes freighted with a heavy pledge  
To your eyes empty of pledges, even of pledges broken?



From *SELECTED POEMS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE*

Y



*From a Very Little Sphinx*

I

Come along in then, little girl!  
Or else stay out!  
But in the open door she stands,  
And bites her lip and twists her hands,  
And stares upon me, trouble-eyed:  
“Mother,” she says, “I can’t decide!  
I can’t decide!”

## II

Oh, burdock, and you other dock,  
That have ground coffee for your seeds,  
And lovely long thin daisies, dear—  
She said that you are weeds!  
She said, “Oh, what a fine bouquet!”  
But afterwards I heard her say,  
“She’s always dragging in those weeds.”

### III

Everybody but just me  
Despises burdocks. Mother, she  
Despises 'em the most because  
They stick so to my socks and drawers.  
But father, when he sits on some,  
Can't speak a decent word for 'em.

#### IV

I know a hundred ways to die.  
I've often thought I'd try one:  
Lie down beneath a motor truck  
Some day when standing by one.

Or throw myself from off a bridge—  
Except such things must be  
So hard upon the scavengers  
And men that clean the sea.

I know some poison I could drink.  
I've often thought I'd taste it.  
But mother bought it for the sink,  
And drinking it would waste it.

## V

Look, Edwin! Do you see that boy  
Talking to the other boy?  
No, over there by those two men—  
Wait, don't look now—now look again.  
No, not the one in navy-blue;  
That's the one he's talking to.  
Sure you see him? Striped pants?  
Well, *he was born in Paris, France.*

## VI

All the grown-up people say,  
“What, those ugly thistles?  
Mustn’t touch them! Keep away!  
Prickly! Full of bristles!”

Yet they never make me bleed  
Half so much as roses!  
Must be purple is a weed,  
And pink and white is posies.

## VII

Wonder where this horseshoe went.  
Up and down, up and down,  
Up and past the monument,  
Maybe into town.

Wait a minute. "Horseshoe,  
How far have you been?"  
*Says it's been to Salem*  
*And halfway to Lynn.*

Wonder who was in the team.  
Wonder what they saw.  
Wonder if they passed a bridge—  
Bridge with a draw.

*Says it went from one bridge*  
*Straight upon another*  
*Says it took a little girl*  
*Driving with her mother.*



From *WINE FROM THESE GRAPES*

Υ



## *The Return*

Earth does not understand her child,  
Who from the loud gregarious town  
Returns, depleted and defiled,  
To the still woods, to fling him down.

Earth can not count the sons she bore:  
The wounded lynx, the wounded man  
Come trailing blood unto her door;  
She shelters both as best she can.

But she is early up and out,  
To trim the year or strip its bones;  
She has no time to stand about  
Talking of him in undertones

Who has no aim but to forget,  
Be left in peace, be lying thus  
For days, for years, for centuries yet,  
Unshaven and anonymous;

Who, marked for failure, dulled by grief,  
Has traded in his wife and friend  
For this warm ledge, this alder leaf:  
Comfort that does not comprehend.

*October—An Etching*

There where the woodcock his long bill among the alders  
Forward in level flight propels,  
Tussocks of faded grass are islands in the pasture swamp  
Where the small foot, if it be light as well, can pass  
Dry-shod to rising ground.

Not so the boot of the hunter.  
Chilly and black and halfway to the knee  
Is the thick water there, heavy wading,  
Uneven to the step; there the more cautious ones,  
Pausing for a moment, break their guns.  
There the white setter ticked with black  
Sets forth with silky feathers on the bird's track  
And wet to his pink skin and half his size comes back.

Cows are pastured there; they have made a path among the alders.  
By now the keeper's boy has found  
The chalk of the woodcock on the trampled ground.

*Autumn Daybreak*

Cold wind of autumn, blowing loud  
At dawn, a fortnight overdue,  
Jostling the doors, and tearing through  
My bedroom to rejoin the cloud,

I know—for I can hear the hiss  
And scrape of leaves along the floor—  
How many boughs, lashed bare by this,  
Will rake the cluttered sky once more.

Tardy, and somewhat south of east,  
The sun will rise at length, made known  
More by the meagre light increased  
Than by a disk in splendour shown;

When, having but to turn my head,  
Through the stripped maple I shall see,  
Bleak and remembered, patched with red,  
The hill all summer hid from me.

*The Oak-Leaves*

Yet in the end, defeated too, worn out and ready to fall,  
Hangs from the drowsy tree with cramped and desperate stem  
above the ditch the last leaf of all.

There is something to be learned, I guess, from looking at the  
dead leaves under the living tree;  
Something to be set to a lusty tune and learned and sung, it well  
might be;  
Something to be learned—though I was ever a ten-o'clock scholar  
at this school—  
Even perhaps by me.

But my heart goes out to the oak-leaves that are the last to sigh  
“Enough,” and loose their hold;  
They have boasted to the nudging frost and to the two-and-thirty  
winds that they would never die,  
Never even grow old.  
(These are those russet leaves that cling  
All winter, even into the spring,  
To the dormant bough, in the wood knee-deep in snow the only  
coloured thing.)

*The Fledgling*

So, art thou feathered, art thou flown,  
Thou naked thing?—and canst alone  
Upon the unsolid summer air  
Sustain thyself, and prosper there?

Shall I no more with anxious note  
Advise thee through the happy day,  
Thrusting the worm into thy throat,  
Bearing thine excrement away?

Alas, I think I see thee yet,  
Perched on the windy parapet,  
Defer thy flight a moment still  
To clean thy wing with careful bill.

And thou art feathered, thou art flown;  
And hast a project of thine own.

*The Hedge of Hemlocks*

Somebody long ago  
Set out this hedge of hemlocks ; brought from the woods, I'd say,  
Saplings ten inches tall, curving and delicate, not shaped like trees,  
And set them out, to shut the marshes from the lawn,  
A hedge of ferns.

Four feet apart he set them, far apart, leaving them room to  
grow . . .

Whose crowded lower boughs these fifty years at least  
Are spiky stumps outthrust in all directions, dry, dropping scaly  
bark, in the deep shade making a thick  
Dust which here and there floats in a short dazzling beam.

Green tops, delicate and curving yet, above this fence of brush,  
like ferns,

You have done well: more than the marshes now is shut away  
from his protected dooryard ;

The mountain, too, is shut away ; not even the wind  
May trespass here to stir the purple phlox in the tall grass.

And yet how easily one afternoon between  
Your stems, unheard, snapping no twig, dislodging  
no shell of loosened bark, unseen  
Even by the spider through whose finished web he walked, and  
left it as he found it,  
A neighbour entered.

*Cap D'Antibes*

The storm is over, and the land has forgotten the storm ; the trees  
are still.

Under this sun the rain dries quickly.

Cones from the sea-pines cover the ground again

Where yesterday for my fire I gathered all in sight ;

But the leaves are meek. The smell of the small alyssum that  
grows wild here

Is in the air. It is a childish morning.

More sea than land am I ; my sulky mind, whipped high by tem-  
pest in the night, is not so soon appeased.

Into my occupations with dull roar

It washes,

It recedes.

Even as at my side in the calm day the disturbed Mediterranean  
Lurches with heavy swell against the bird-twittering shore.

*From a Train Window*

Precious in the light of the early sun the Housatonic  
Between its not unscalable mountains flows.  
Precious in the January morning the shabby fur of the cat-tails  
by the stream.  
The farmer driving his horse to the feed-store for a sack of cracked  
corn  
Is not in haste ; there is no whip in the socket.

Pleasant enough, gay even, by no means sad  
Is the rickety graveyard on the hill. Those are not cypress trees  
Perpendicular among the lurching slabs, but cedars from the  
neighbourhood,  
Native to this rocky land, self-sown. Precious  
In the early light, reassuring  
Is the grave-scarred hillside.  
As if after all, the earth might know what it is about.

*The Fawn*

There it was I saw what I shall never forget  
And never retrieve.

Monstrous and beautiful to human eyes, hard to believe,  
He lay, yet there he lay,  
Asleep on the moss, his head on his polished cleft small ebony  
hooves,  
The child of the doe, the dappled child of the deer.

Surely his mother had never said, "Lie here  
Till I return," so spotty and plain to see  
On the green moss lay he.  
His eyes had opened; he considered me.

I would have given more than I care to say  
To thrifty ears, might I have had him for my friend  
One moment only of that forest day:

Might I have had the acceptance, not the love  
Of those clear eyes;

Might I have been for him the bough above  
Or the root beneath his forest bed,  
A part of the forest, seen without surprise.

Was it alarm, or was it the wind of my fear lest he depart  
That jerked him to his jointy knees,  
And sent him crashing off, leaping and stumbling  
On his new legs, between the stems of the white trees?

I

*Valentine*

Oh, what a shining town were Death  
Woke you therein, and drew your breath,  
My buried love; and all you were,  
Caught up and cherished, even there.  
Those evil windows loved of none  
Would blaze as if they caught the sun.

Woke you in Heaven, Death's kinder name,  
And downward in sweet gesture came  
From your cold breast your rigid hand,  
Then Heaven would be my native land.

But you are nowhere: you are gone  
All roads into Oblivion.  
Whither I would disperse, till then  
From home a banished citizen.

## II

### *In the Grave No Flower*

Here dock and tare.

But there

No flower.

Here beggar-ticks, 'tis true ;

Here the rank-smelling

Thorn-apple,—and who

Would plant this by his dwelling ?

Here every manner of weed

To mock the faithful harrow :

Thistles, that feed

None but the finches ; yarrow,

Blue vervain, yellow charlock ; here

Bindweed, that chokes the struggling year ;

Broad plantain and narrow.

But there no flower.

The rye is vexed and thinned,  
The wheat comes limping home,  
By vetch and whiteweed harried, and the sandy bloom  
Of the sour-grass ; here  
Dandelions,—and the wind  
Will blow them everywhere.

Save there.

There

No flower.

### III

#### *Childhood Is the Kingdom Where Nobody Dies*

Childhood is not from birth to a certain age and at a certain age  
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.  
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.

Nobody that matters, that is. Distant relatives of course  
Die, whom one never has seen or has seen for an hour,  
And they gave one candy in a pink-and-green striped bag, or a  
    jack-knife,  
And went away, and cannot really be said to have lived at all.

And cats die. They lie on the floor and lash their tails,  
And their reticent fur is suddenly all in motion  
With fleas that one never knew were there,  
Polished and brown, knowing all there is to know,  
Trekking off into the living world.  
You fetch a shoe-box, but it's much too small, because she won't  
    curl up now:  
So you find a bigger box, and bury her in the yard, and weep.

But you do not wake up a month from then, two months,  
A year from then, two years, in the middle of the night  
And weep, with your knuckles in your mouth, and say Oh, God!  
Oh, God!

Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies that matters,—  
mothers and fathers don't die.

And if you have said, "For heaven's sake, must you always be  
kissing a person?"

Or, "I do wish to gracious you'd stop tapping on the window  
with your thimble!"

Tomorrow, or even the day after tomorrow if you're busy having  
fun,

Is plenty of time to say, "I'm sorry, mother."

To be grown up is to sit at the table with people who have died,  
who neither listen nor speak;

Who do not drink their tea, though they always said  
Tea was such a comfort.

Run down into the cellar and bring up the last jar of raspberries;  
they are not tempted.

Flatter them, ask them what was it they said exactly  
That time, to the bishop, or to the overseer, or to Mrs. Mason ;  
They are not taken in.  
Shout at them, get red in the face, rise,  
Drag them up out of their chairs by their stiff shoulders and shake  
them and yell at them ;  
They are not startled, they are not even embarrassed ; they slide  
back into their chairs.

Your tea is cold now.  
You drink it standing up,  
And leave the house.

## IV

### *The Solid Sprite Who Stands Alone*

The solid sprite who stands alone,  
And walks the world with equal stride,  
Grieve though he may, is not undone  
Because a friend has died.

He knows that man is born to care,  
And ten and threescore's all his span;  
And this is comfort and to spare  
For such a level man.

He is not made like crooked me,  
Who cannot rise nor lift my head,  
And all because what had to be  
Has been, what lived is dead;

Who lie among my tears and rust,  
And all because a mortal brain  
That loved to think, is clogged with dust,  
And will not think again.

V

*Spring in the Garden*

Ah, cannot the curled shoots of the larkspur that you loved so,  
Cannot the spiny poppy that no winter kills  
Instruct you how to return through the thawing ground and the  
    thin snow  
Into this April sun that is driving the mist between the hills?

A good friend to the monkshood in a time of need  
You were, and the lupine's friend as well;  
But I see the lupine lift the ground like a tough weed  
And the earth over the monkshood swell,

And I fear that not a root in all this heaving sea  
Of land, has nudged you where you lie, has found  
Patience and time to direct you, numb and stupid as you still  
    must be  
From your first winter underground.

## VI

### *Sonnet*

Time that renews the tissues of this frame,  
That built the child and hardened the soft bone,  
Taught him to wail, to blink, to walk alone,  
Stare, question, wonder, give the world a name,  
Forget the watery darkness whence he came,  
Attends no less the boy to manhood grown,  
Brings him new raiment, strips him of his own:  
All skins are shed at length, remorse, even shame.  
Such hope is mine, if this indeed be true,  
I dread no more the first white in my hair,  
Or even age itself, the easy shoe,  
The cane, the wrinkled hands, the special chair:  
Time, doing this to me, may alter too  
My anguish, into something I can bear.

*Aubade*

Cool and beautiful as the blossom of the wild carrot  
With its crimson central eye,  
Round and beautiful as the globe of the onion blossom  
Were her pale breasts whereon I laid me down to die.

From the wound of my enemy that thrust me through in the  
    dark wood  
I arose; with sweat on my lip and the wild woodgrasses in my  
    spur  
I arose and stood.  
But never did I arise from loving her.

*Sappho Crosses the Dark River into Hades*

Charon, indeed, your dreaded oar,  
With what a peaceful sound it dips  
Into the stream; how gently, too,  
From the wet blade the water drips.

I knew a ferryman before.  
But he was not so old as you.  
He spoke from unembittered lips,  
With careless eyes on the bright sea  
One day, such bitter words to me  
As age and wisdom never knew.

This was a man of meagre fame;  
He ferried merchants from the shore  
To Mitylene (whence I came)  
On Lesbos; Phaon is his name.

I hope that he will never die,  
As I have done, and come to dwell  
In this pale city we approach.

Not that, indeed, I wish him well,  
(Though never have I wished him harm)  
But rather that I hope to find  
In some unechoing street of Hell  
The peace I long have had in mind:  
A peace whereon may not encroach  
That supple back, the strong brown arm,  
That curving mouth, the sunburned curls;  
But rather that I would rely,  
Having come so far, at such expense,  
Upon some quiet lodging whence  
I need not hear his voice go by  
In scraps of talk with boys and girls.

*Epitaph*

Grieve not for happy Claudius, he is dead;  
And empty is his skull.  
Pity no longer, arm-in-arm with Dread,  
Walks in that polished hall.

Joy, too, is fled.  
But no man can have all.

*On Thought in Harness*

My falcon to my wrist  
Returns  
From no high air.  
I sent her toward the sun that burns  
Above the mist;  
But she has not been there.

Her talons are not cold; her beak  
Is closed upon no wonder;  
Her head stinks of its hood, her feathers reek  
Of me, that quake at the thunder.

Degraded bird, I give you back your eyes forever, ascend how  
whither you are tossed;  
Forsake this wrist, forsake this rhyme;  
Soar, eat ether, see what has never been seen; depart, be lost,  
But climb.

## *Desolation Dreamed Of*

Desolation dreamed of, though not accomplished,  
Set my heart to rocking like a boat in a swell.  
To every face I met, I said farewell.

*Green rollers breaking white along a clean beach . . . when shall I reach that  
island?*

*Gladly, O painted nails and shaven arm-pits, would I see less of you!*

*Gladly, gladly would I be far from you for a long time, O noise and stench of  
man!*

I said farewell. Nevertheless,

Whom have I quitted?—which of my possessions do I propose  
to leave?

Not one. This feigning to be asleep when wide awake is all the  
loneliness

I shall ever achieve.

*The Leaf and the Tree*

When will you learn, my self, to be  
A dying leaf on a living tree?  
Budding, swelling, growing strong,  
Wearing green, but not for long,  
Drawing sustenance from air,  
That other leaves, and you not there,  
May bud, and at the autumn's call  
Wearing russet, ready to fall?

Has not this trunk a deed to do  
Ungessed by small and tremulous you?  
Shall not these branches in the end  
To wisdom and the truth ascend?  
And the great lightning plunging by  
Look sidewise with a golden eye  
To glimpse a tree so tall and proud  
It sheds its leaves upon a cloud?

Here, I think, is the heart's grief:  
The tree, no mightier than the leaf,  
Makes firm its root and spreads its crown  
And stands; but in the end comes down.  
That airy top no boy could climb  
Is trodden in a little time  
By cattle on their way to drink.  
The fluttering thoughts a leaf can think,  
That hears the wind and waits its turn,  
Have taught it all a tree can learn.

Time can make soft that iron wood.  
The tallest trunk that ever stood,  
In time, without a dream to keep,  
Crawls in beside the root to sleep.

*On the Wide Heath*

On the wide heath at evening overtaken,  
When the fast-reddening sun  
Drops, and against the sky the looming bracken  
Waves, and the day is done,

Though no unfriendly nostril snuffs his bone,  
Though English wolves be dead,  
The fox abroad on errands of his own,  
The adder gone to bed,

The weary traveler from his aching hip  
Lengthens his long stride;  
Though Home be but a humming on his lip,  
No happiness, no pride,

He does not drop him under the yellow whin  
To sleep the darkness through;  
Home to the yellow light that shines within  
The kitchen of a loud shrew,

Home over stones and sand, through stagnant water  
He goes, mile after mile  
Home to a wordless poaching son and a daughter  
With a disdainful smile,

Home to the worn reproach, the disagreeing,  
The shelter, the stale air ; content to be  
Pecked at, confined, encroached upon,—it being  
Too lonely, to be free.

## *Apostrophe to Man*

*(on reflecting that the world is ready to go to war again)*

Detestable race, continue to expunge yourself, die out.  
Breed faster, crowd, encroach, sing hymns, build bombing air-  
planes;  
Make speeches, unveil statues, issue bonds, parade;  
Convert again into explosives the bewildered ammonia and the  
distracted cellulose;  
Convert again into putrescent matter drawing flies  
The hopeful bodies of the young; exhort,  
Pray, pull long faces, be earnest, be all but overcome, be photo-  
graphed;  
Confer, perfect your formulae, commercialize  
Bacteria harmful to human tissue,  
Put death on the market;  
Breed, crowd, encroach, expand, expunge yourself, die out,  
*Homo* called *sapiens*.

*My Spirit, Sore from Marching*

My spirit, sore from marching  
Toward that receding west  
Where Pity shall be governor,  
With Wisdom for his guest:

Lie down beside these waters  
That bubble from the spring;  
Hear in the desert silence  
The desert sparrow sing;

Draw from the shapeless moment  
Such pattern as you can;  
And cleave henceforth to Beauty;  
Expect no more from man.

Man, with his ready answer,  
His sad and hearty word,  
For every cause in limbo,  
For every debt deferred,

For every pledge forgotten,  
His eloquent and grim  
Deep empty gaze upon you,—  
Expect no more from him.

From cool and aimless Beauty  
Your bread and comfort take,  
Beauty, that made no promise,  
And has no word to break;

Have eyes for Beauty only,  
That has no eyes for you;  
Follow her struck pavilion,  
Halt with her retinue;

Catch from the board of Beauty  
Such careless crumbs as fall.  
Here's hope for priest and layman;  
Here's heresy for all.

*Conscientious Objector*

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death.

I hear him leading his horse out of the stall ; I hear the clatter on  
the barn-floor.

He is in haste ; he has business in Cuba, business in the Balkans,  
many calls to make this morning.

But I will not hold the bridle while he cinches the girth.

And he may mount by himself : I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him  
which way the fox ran.

With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where the black  
boy hides in the swamp.

I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death ; I am not on  
his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends nor of my ene-  
mies either.

Though he promise me much, I will not map him the route to  
any man's door.

Am I a spy in the land of the living, that I should deliver men to  
Death?

Brother, the password and the plans of our city are safe with me;  
never through me

Shall you be overcome.

*Above These Cares*

Above these cares my spirit in calm abiding  
Floats like a swimmer at sunrise, facing the pale sky;  
Peaceful, heaved by the light infrequent lurch of the heavy wave  
serenely sliding  
Under his weightless body, aware of the wide morning, aware of  
the gull on the red buoy bedaubed with guano, aware of his  
sharp cry;  
Idly athirst for the sea, as who should say:  
In a moment I will roll upon my mouth and drink it dry.

Painfully, under the pressure that obtains  
At the sea's bottom, crushing my lungs and my brains  
(For the body makes shift to breathe and after a fashion flourish  
Ten fathoms deep in care,  
Ten fathoms down in an element denser than air  
Wherein the soul must perish)  
I trap and harvest, stilling my stomach's needs;  
I crawl forever, hoping never to see  
Above my head the limbs of my spirit no longer free  
Kicking in frenzy, a swimmer enmeshed in weeds.

*If Still Your Orchards Bear*

Brother, that breathe the August air  
Ten thousand years from now,  
And smell—if still your orchards bear  
Tart apples on the bough—

The early windfall under the tree,  
And see the red fruit shine,  
I cannot think your thoughts will be  
Much different from mine.

Should at that moment the full moon  
Step forth upon the hill,  
And memories hard to bear at noon,  
By moonlight harder still,

Form in the shadows of the trees,—  
Things that you could not spare  
And live, or so you thought, yet these  
All gone, and you still there,

A man no longer what he was,  
Nor yet the thing he'd planned,  
The chilly apple from the grass  
Warmed by your living hand—

I think you will have need of tears;  
I think they will not flow;  
Supposing in ten thousand years  
Men ache, as they do now.

*Lines for a Grave-Stone*

Man alive, that mournst thy lot,  
Desiring what thou hast not got,  
Money, beauty, love, what not ;

Deeming it blessedder to be  
A rotted man, than live to see  
So rude a sky as covers thee ;

Deeming thyself of all unblest  
And wretched souls the wretchedest,  
Longing to die and be at rest ;

Know : that however grim the fate  
Which sent thee forth to meditate  
Upon my enviable state,

Here lieth one who would resign  
Gladly his lot, to shoulder thine.  
Give me thy coat ; get into mine.

*How Naked, How Without a Wall*

How naked, how without a wall  
    Against the wind and the sharp sleet,  
He fares at night, who fares at all  
    Forth from the stove's heat.

Or if the moon be in the sky,  
    Or if the stars, and the late moon  
Not rising till an hour goes by,  
    And Libra setting soon,

How naked, how without a stitch  
    To shut him from the earnest air,  
He goes, who by the whispering ditch  
    Alone at night will fare.

Nor is it but the rising chill  
    From the warm weeds, that strikes him cold;  
Nor that the stridulant hedge grows still,  
    Like what has breath to hold,

Until his tiny foot go past  
At length, with its enormous sound;  
Nor yet his helpless shadow cast  
To any wolf around.

Bare to the moon and her cold rays  
He takes the road, who by and by  
Goes bare beneath the moony gaze  
Of his own awful eye.

He sees his motive, like a fox  
Hid in a badger's hole; he sees  
His honour, strangled, in a box,  
Her neck lashed to her knees.

The man who ventures forth alone  
When other men are snug within,  
Walks on his marrow, not his bone,  
And lacks his outer skin.

The draughty caverns of his breath  
Grow visible, his heart shines through:  
Surely a thing which only death  
Can have the right to do.

From *HUNTSMAN, WHAT QUARRY?*

Y



*The Ballad of Chaldon Down*

In April, when the yellow whin  
Was out of doors, and I within,—  
And magpies nested in the thorn  
Where not a man or woman born  
Might spy upon them, save he be  
Content to bide indefinitely  
On Chaldon Heath, hung from a pin,  
A great man in a small thorn tree—

In April, when, as I have said,  
The golden gorse was all in bloom,  
And I confinèd to my room,  
And there confinèd to my bed,  
As sick as mortal man could be,  
A lady came from over the sea,  
All for to say good-day to me.

All in a green and silver gown,  
With half its flounces in her hand,  
She came across the windy down,

She came, and pricked the furrowed land  
With heels of slippers built for town,  
All for to say good-day to me.

The Channel fog was in her hair,  
Her cheek was cool with Channel fog;  
Pale cowslips from the sloping hedge,  
And samphire from the salty ledge,  
And the sweet myrtle of the bog  
She brought me as I languished there;  
But of the blackthorn, the blue sloe,  
No branch to lay a body low.

She came to me by ditch and stile,  
She came to me through heather and brake,  
And many and many a flinty mile  
She walked in April for my sake,  
All for to say good-day to me.

She came by way of Lulworth Cove,  
She came by way of Diffey's Farm;  
All in a green and silver frock,  
With half its flounces over her arm,

By the Bat's Head at dusk she came,  
Where inland from the Channel drove  
The fog, and from the Shambles heard  
The horn above the hidden rock;

And startled many a wild sea-bird  
To fly unseen from Durdle Door  
Into the fog; and left the shore,  
And found a track without a name  
That led to Chaldon, and so came  
Over the downs to Chydyok,  
All for to say good-day to me.

All for to ask me only this—  
As she shook out her skirts to dry,  
And laughed, and looked me in the eye,  
And gave me two cold hands to kiss:  
That I be steadfast, that I lie  
And strengthen and forbear to die.  
All for to say that I must be  
Son of my sires, who lived to see  
The gorse in bloom at ninety-three,  
All for to say good-day to me.

*The Princess Recalls Her One Adventure*

Hard is my pillow  
Of down from the duck's breast,  
Harsh the linen cover ;  
I cannot rest.

Fall down, my tears,  
Upon the fine hem,  
Upon the lonely letters  
Of my long name ;  
Drown the sigh of them.

We stood by the lake  
And we neither kissed nor spoke ;  
We heard how the small waves  
Lurched and broke,  
And chuckled in the rock.

We spoke and turned away.  
We never kissed at all.  
Fall down, my tears.

I wish that you might fall  
On the road by the lake,  
Where my cob went lame,  
And I stood with the groom  
Till the carriage came.

*Short Story*

In a fine country, in a sunny country,  
Among the hills I knew,  
I built a house for the wren that lives in the orchard,  
And a house for you.

The house I built for the wren had a round entrance,  
Neat and very small;  
But the house I built for you had a great doorway,  
For a lady proud and tall.

You came from a country where the shrubby sweet lavender  
Lives the mild winter through;  
The lavender died each winter in the garden  
Of the house I built for you.

You were troubled and came to me because the farmer  
Called the autumn "the fall";  
You thought that a country where the lavender died in the winter  
Was not a country at all.

The wrens return each year to the house in the orchard;  
They have lived, they have seen the world, they know what's best  
For a wren and his wife; in the handsome house I gave them  
They build their twiggy nest.

But you, you foolish girl, you have gone home  
To a leaky castle across the sea,—  
To lie awake in linen smelling of lavender,  
And hear the nightingale, and long for me.

*Pretty Love, I Must Outlive You*

Pretty Love, I must outlive you ;  
And my little dog Llewelyn,  
Dreaming here with treble whimpers,  
Jerking paws and twitching nostrils  
On the hearth-rug, will outlive you,  
If no trap or shot-gun gets him.

Parrots, tortoises and redwoods  
Live a longer life than men do,  
Men a longer life than dogs do,  
Dogs a longer life than love does.

What a fool I was to take you,  
Pretty Love, into my household,  
Shape my days and nights to charm you,  
Center all my hopes about you,  
Knowing well I must outlive you,  
If no trap or shot-gun gets me.

*English Sparrows*

*(Washington Square)*

How sweet the sound in the city an hour before sunrise,  
When the park is empty and grey and the light clear and so lovely  
I must sit on the floor before my open window for an hour with  
my arms on the sill

And my cheek on my arm, watching the spring sky's  
Soft suffusion from the roofed horizon upward with palest rose,  
Doting on the charming sight with eyes

Open, eyes closed;

Breathing with quiet pleasure the cool air cleansed by the night,  
lacking all will

To let such happiness go, nor thinking the least thing ill  
In me for such indulgence, pleased with the day and with myself.

How sweet

The noisy chirping of the urchin sparrows from crevice and shelf  
Under my window, and from down there in the street,  
Announcing the advance of the roaring competitive day with city  
bird-song.

A bumbling bus  
Goes under the arch. A man bareheaded and alone  
Walks to a bench and sits down.  
He breathes the morning with me; his thoughts are his own.  
Together we watch the first magnanimous  
Rays of the sun on the tops of greening trees and on houses of  
red brick and of stone.

*Impression: Fog Off the Coast of Dorset*

As day was born, as night was dying,  
The seagulls woke me with their crying;  
And from the reef the mooing horn  
Spoke to the waker: Day is born  
And night is dying, but still the fog  
On dimly looming deck and spar  
Is dewy, and on the vessel's log,  
And cold the first-mate's fingers are,  
And wet the pen wherewith they write  
"Off Portland. Fog. No land in sight."  
—As night was dying, and glad to die,  
And day, with dull and gloomy eye,  
Lifting the sun, a smoky lamp,  
Peered into fog, that swaddled sky  
And wave alike: a shifty damp  
Unwieldy province, loosely ruled,  
Turned over to a prince unschooled,  
That he must govern with sure hand  
Straightway, not knowing sea from land.

## *The Rabbit*

Hearing the hawk squeal in the high sky

I and the rabbit trembled.

Only the dark small rabbits newly kittled in their neatly dis-  
sembled

Hollowed nest in the thicket thatched with straw

Did not respect his cry.

At least, not that I saw.

But I have said to the rabbit with rage and a hundred times,

“Hop!

Streak it for the bushes! Why do you sit so still?

You are bigger than a house, I tell you, you are bigger than a  
hill, you are a beacon for air-planes!

O indiscreet!

And the hawk and all my friends are out to kill!

Get under cover!” But the rabbit never stirred; she never will.

And I shall see again and again the large eye blaze  
With death, and gently glaze;  
The leap into the air I shall see again and again, and the kicking  
feet;  
And the sudden quiet everlasting, and the blade of grass green in  
the strange mouth of the interrupted grazer.

*Song for Young Lovers in a City*

Though less for love than for the deep  
Though transient death that follows it  
These childish mouths grown soft in sleep  
Here in a rented bed have met,

They have not met in love's despite . . .  
Such tiny loves will leap and flare  
Lurid as coke-fires in the night,  
Against a background of despair.

To treeless grove, to grey retreat  
Descend in flocks from corniced eaves  
The pigeons now on sooty feet,  
To cover them with linden leaves.

*To a Calvinist in Bali*

You that are sprung of northern stock,  
And nothing lavish,—born and bred  
With tablets at your foot and head,  
And CULPA carven in the rock,

Sense with delight but not with ease  
The fragrance of the quinine trees,  
The *kembang-spatu*'s lolling flame  
With solemn envy kin to shame.

Ah, be content!—the scorpion's tail  
Atones for much; without avail  
Under the sizzling solar pan  
Our sleeping servant pulls the fan.

Even in this island richly blest,  
Where Beauty walks with naked breast,  
Earth is too harsh for Heaven to be  
One little hour in jeopardy.

## *Thanksgiving Dinner*

Ah, broken garden, frost on the melons and on the beans!

Frozen are the ripe tomatoes, the red fruit and the hairy golden  
stem;

Frozen are the grapes, and the vine above them frozen, and the  
peppers are frozen!

And I walk among them smiling,—for what of them?

I can live on the woody fibres of the overgrown

Kohl-rabi, on the spongy radish coarse and hot,

I can live on what the squirrels may have left of the beechnuts  
and the acorns . . .

For pride in my love, who might well have died, and did not.

I will cook for my love a banquet of beets and cabbages,

Leeks, potatoes, turnips, all such fruits . . .

For my clever love, who has returned from further than the far  
east;

We will laugh like spring above the steaming, stolid winter roots.

*The Snow Storm*

No hawk hangs over in this air :  
The urgent snow is everywhere.  
The wing adroiter than a sail  
Must lean away from such a gale,  
Abandoning its straight intent,  
Or else expose tough ligament  
And tender flesh to what before  
Meant dampened feathers, nothing more.

Forceless upon our backs there fall  
Infrequent flakes hexagonal,  
Devised in many a curious style  
To charm our safety for a while,  
Where close to earth like mice we go  
Under the horizontal snow.

*Huntsman, What Quarry?*

“Huntsman, what quarry  
On the dry hill  
Do your hounds harry?

When the red oak is bare  
And the white oak still  
Rattles its leaves  
In the cold air:  
What fox runs there?”

“Girl, gathering acorns  
In the cold autumn,  
I hunt the hot pads  
That ever run before,  
I hunt the pointed mask  
That makes no reply,  
I hunt the red brush  
Of remembered joy.”

“To tame or to destroy?”

“To destroy.”

“Huntsman, hard by  
In a wood of grey beeches  
Whose leaves are on the ground,  
Is a house with a fire;  
You can see the smoke from here.  
There’s supper and a soft bed  
And not a soul around.  
Come with me there;  
Bide there with me;  
And let the fox run free.”

The horse that he rode on  
Reached down its neck,  
Blew upon the acorns,  
Nuzzled them aside;  
The sun was near setting;  
He thought, “Shall I heed her?”  
He thought, “Shall I take her  
For a one-night’s bride?”

He smelled the sweet smoke,  
He looked the lady over;  
Her hand was on his knee;  
But like a flame from cover  
The red fox broke—  
And “Hoick! Hoick!” cried he.

*Not So Far as the Forest*

I

That chill is in the air  
Which the wise know well, and even have learned to bear.  
This joy, I know,  
Will soon be under snow.

The sun sets in a cloud  
And is not seen.  
Beauty, that spoke aloud,  
Addresses now only the remembering ear.  
The heart begins here  
To feed on what has been.

Night falls fast.  
Today is in the past.

Blown from the dark hill hither to my door  
Three flakes, then four  
Arrive, then many more.

## II

Branch by branch  
This tree has died. Green only  
Is one last bough, moving its leaves in the sun.

What evil ate its root, what blight,  
What ugly thing,  
Let the mole say, the bird sing;  
Or the white worm behind the shedding bark  
Tick in the dark.

You and I have only one thing to do:  
Saw the trunk through.

### III

Distressèd mind, forbear  
To tease the hooded Why;  
That shape will not reply.

From the warm chair  
To the wind's welter  
Flee, if storm's your shelter.

But no, you needs must part,  
Fling him his release—  
On whose ungenerous heart  
Alone you are at peace.

#### IV

Not dead of wounds, not borne  
Home to the village on a litter of branches, torn  
By splendid claws and the talk all night of the villagers,  
But stung to death by gnats  
Lies Love.

What swamp I sweated through for all these years  
Is at length plain to me.

# V

Poor passionate thing,  
Even with this clipped wing how well you flew!—though not so  
far as the forest.

Unwounded and unspent, serene but for the eye's bright trouble,  
Was it the lurching flight, the unequal wind under the lopped  
feathers that brought you down,  
To sit in folded colours on the level empty field,  
Visible as a ship, paling the yellow stubble?

Rebellious bird, warm body foreign and bright,  
Has no one told you?—Hopeless is your flight  
Towards the high branches. Here is your home,  
Between the barnyard strewn with grain and the forest tree.  
Though Time refeather the wing,  
Ankle slip the ring,  
The once-confined thing  
Is never again free.

*Rendezvous*

Not for these lovely blooms that prank your chambers did I  
    come. Indeed,  
I could have loved you better in the dark;  
That is to say, in rooms less bright with roses, rooms more  
    casual, less aware  
Of History in the wings about to enter with benevolent air  
On ponderous tiptoe, at the cue "Proceed."  
Not that I like the ash-trays over-crowded and the place in a  
    mess,  
Or the monastic cubicle too unctuously austere and stark,  
But partly that these formal garlands for our Eighth Street  
    Aphrodite are a bit too Greek,  
And partly that to make the poor walls rich with our unaided  
    loveliness  
Would have been more *chic*.

Yet here I am, having told you of my quarrel with the taxi-driver  
    over a line of Milton, and you laugh; and you are you,  
    none other.  
Your laughter pelts my skin with small delicious blows.

But I am perverse: I wish you had not scrubbed—with pumice,  
I suppose—  
The tobacco stains from your beautiful fingers. And I wish I did  
not feel like your mother.

## *The Fitting*

The fitter said, "*Madame, vous avez maigri,*"  
And pinched together a handful of skirt at my hip.  
"*Tant mieux,*" I said, and looked away slowly, and took my  
under-lip  
Softly between my teeth.

Rip—rip!  
Out came the seam, and was pinned together in another place.  
She knelt before me, a hardworking woman with a familiar and  
unknown face,  
Dressed in linty black, very tight in the arm's-eye and smelling  
of sweat.  
She rose, lifting my arm, and set her cold shears against me,—  
snip-snip;  
Her knuckles gouged my breast. My drooped eyes lifted to my  
guarded eyes in the glass, and glanced away as from some-  
one they had never met.

"*Ah, que madame a maigri!*" cried the *vendeuse*, coming in with dresses over her arm.

"*C'est la chaleur,*" I said, looking out into the sunny tops of the horse-chestnuts—and indeed it was very warm.

I stood for a long time so, looking out into the afternoon, thinking of the evening and you. . . .

While they murmured busily in the distance, turning me, touching my secret body, doing what they were paid to do.

*What Savage Blossom*

Do I not know what savage blossom only under the pitting hail  
Of your inclement climate could have prospered? Here lie  
Green leaves to wade in, and of the many roads not one road  
    leading outward from this place  
But is blocked by boughs that will hiss and simmer when they  
    burn—green autumn, lady, green autumn on this land!

Do I not know what inward pressure only could inflate its petals  
    to withstand  
(No, no, not hate, not hate) the onslaught of a little time with  
    you?

No, no, not love, not love. Call it by name,  
Now that it's over, now that it is gone and cannot hear us.

It was an honest thing. Not noble. Yet no shame.

*Menses*

*(He speaks, but to himself, being aware how it is with her)*

Think not I have not heard.  
Well-fanged the double word  
And well-directed flew.

I felt it. Down my side  
Innocent as oil I see the ugly venom slide:  
Poison enough to stiffen us both, and all our friends;  
But I am not pierced, so there the mischief ends.

There is more to be said; I see it coiling;  
The impact will be pain.  
Yet coil; yet strike again.  
You cannot riddle the stout mail I wove  
Long since, of wit and love.

As for my answer . . . stupid in the sun  
He lies, his fangs drawn:  
I will not war with you.

You know how wild you are. You are willing to be turned  
To other matters; you would be grateful, even.  
You watch me shyly. I (for I have learned  
More things than one in our few years together)  
Chafe at the churlish wind, the unseasonable weather.

“Unseasonable?” you cry, with harsher scorn  
Than the theme warrants; “Every year it is the same!  
‘Unseasonable!’ they whine, these stupid peasants!—and never  
since they were born  
Have they known a spring less wintry! Lord, the shame,  
The crying shame of seeing a man no wiser than the beasts he  
feeds—  
His skull as empty as a shell!”

(“Go to. You are unwell.”)

Such is my thought, but such are not my words.

“What is the name,” I ask, “of those big birds  
With yellow breast and low and heavy flight,  
That make such mournful whistling?”

“Meadowlarks,”

You answer primly, not a little cheered.

“Some people shoot them.” Suddenly your eyes are wet

And your chin trembles. On my breast you lean,

And sob most pitifully for all the lovely things that are not and  
have been.

“How silly I am!—and I *know* how silly I am!”

You say; “You are very patient. You are very kind.

I shall be better soon. Just Heaven consign and damn

To tedious Hell this body with its muddy feet in my mind!”

*The Plaid Dress*

Strong sun, that bleach

The curtains of my room, can you not render

Colourless this dress I wear?—

This violent plaid

Of purple angers and red shames; the yellow stripe

Of thin but valid treacheries; the flashy green of kind deeds done

Through indolence, high judgments given in haste;

The recurring checker of the serious breach of taste?

No more uncoloured than unmade,

I fear, can be this garment that I may not doff;

Confession does not strip it off,

To send me homeward eased and bare;

All through the formal, unoffending evening, under the clean

Bright hair,

Lining the subtle gown . . . it is not seen,

But it is there.

*"Fontaine, Je Ne Boirai Pas De Ton Eau!"*

I know I might have lived in such a way  
As to have suffered only pain:  
Loving not man nor dog;  
Not money, even; feeling  
Toothache perhaps, but never more than an hour away  
From skill and novocaine;  
Making no contacts, dealing with life through agents, drinking  
    one cocktail, betting two dollars, wearing raincoats in the  
    rain;  
Betrayed at length by no one but the fog  
Whispering to the wing of the plane.

"Fountain," I have cried to that unbubbling well, "I will not  
    drink of thy water!" Yet I thirst  
For a mouthful of—not to swallow, only to rinse my mouth in  
    —peace. And while the eyes of the past condemn,  
The eyes of the present narrow into assignation. And . . .  
    worst . . .  
The young are so old, they are born with their fingers crossed;  
    I shall get no help from them.

*Intention to Escape from Him*

I think I will learn some beautiful language, useless for commercial  
Purposes, work hard at that.

I think I will learn the Latin name of every songbird, not only in  
America but wherever they sing.

(Shun meditation, though; invite the controversial:

Is the world flat? Do bats eat cats?) By digging hard I might  
deflect that river, my mind, that uncontrollable thing,

Turgid and yellow, strong to overflow its banks in spring, carry-  
ing away bridges;

A bed of pebbles now, through which there trickles one clear  
narrow stream, following a course henceforth nefast—

Dig, dig; and if I come to ledges, blast.

*To a Young Poet*

Time cannot break the bird's wing from the bird.  
Bird and wing together  
Go down, one feather.

No thing that ever flew,  
Not the lark, not you,  
Can die as others do.

### *Modern Declaration*

I, having loved ever since I was a child a few things, never having  
wavered

In these affections; never through shyness in the houses of the  
rich or in the presence of clergymen having denied these  
loves;

Never when worked upon by cynics like chiropractors having  
grunted or clicked a vertebra to the discredit of these loves;

Never when anxious to land a job having diminished them by a  
conniving smile; or when befuddled by drink

Jeered at them through heartache or lazily fondled the fingers of  
their alert enemies; declare

That I shall love you always.

No matter what party is in power;

No matter what temporarily expedient combination of allied  
interests wins the war;

Shall love you always.

*The Road to the Past*

It is this that you get for being so far-sighted. Not so many years  
For the myopic, as for me,  
The delightful shape, implored and hard of heart, proceeding  
Into the past unheeding,  
(No wave of the hand, no backward look to see  
If I still stand there) clear and precise along that road appears.

The trees that edge that road run parallel  
For eyes like mine past many towns, past hell seen plainly;  
All that has happened shades that street;  
Children all day, even the awkward, the ungainly  
Of mind, work out on paper problems more abstruse;  
Demonstrably these eyes will close  
Before those hedges meet.

*The True Encounter*

“Wolf!” cried my cunning heart  
At every sheep it spied,  
And roused the countryside.

“Wolf! Wolf!”—and up would start  
Good neighbours, bringing spade  
And pitchfork to my aid.

At length my cry was known:  
Therein lay my release.  
I met the wolf alone  
And was devoured in peace.

*Theme and Variations*

I

Not even my pride will suffer much;  
Not even my pride at all, maybe,  
If this ill-timed, intemperate clutch  
Be loosed by you and not by me,  
Will suffer; I have been so true  
A vestal to that only pride  
Wet wood cannot extinguish, nor  
Sand, nor its embers scattered, for,  
See all these years, it has not died.

And if indeed, as I dare think,  
You cannot push this patient flame,  
By any breath your lungs could store,  
Even for a moment to the floor  
To crawl there, even for a moment crawl,  
What can you mix for me to drink  
That shall deflect me? What you do  
Is either malice, crude defense  
Of ego, or indifference:

I know these things as well as you;  
You do not dazzle me at all.

Some love, and some simplicity,  
Might well have been the death of me.

## II

Heart, do not bruise the breast  
That sheltered you so long;  
Beat quietly, strange guest.

Or have I done you wrong  
To feed you life so fast?  
Why, no; digest this food  
And thrive. You could outlast  
Discomfort if you would.

You do not know for whom  
These tears drip through my hands.  
You thud in the bright room  
Darkly. This pain demands  
No action on your part,  
Who never saw that face.

These eyes, that let him in,  
(Not you, my guiltless heart)  
These eyes, let them erase  
His image, blot him out  
With weeping, and go blind.

Heart, do not stain my skin  
With bruises ; go about  
Your simple function. Mind,  
Sleep now ; do not intrude ;  
And do not spy ; be kind.

Sweet blindness, now begin.

### III

Rolled in the trough of thick desire,  
No oars, and no sea-anchor out  
To bring my bow into the pyre  
Of sunset, suddenly chilling out  
To shadow over sky and sea,  
And the boat helpless in the trough;  
No oil to pour; no power in me  
To breast these waves, to shake them off:

I feel such pity for the poor,  
Who take the fracas on the beam—  
Being ill-equipped, being insecure—  
Daily; and caulk the opening seam  
With strips of shirt and scribbled rhyme;  
Who bail disaster from the boat  
With a pint can; and have no time,  
Being so engrossed to keep afloat,  
Even for quarrelling (that chagrined  
And lavish comfort of the heart),  
Who never came into the wind,  
Who took life beam-on from the start.

#### IV

And do you think that love itself,  
Living in such an ugly house,  
Can prosper long?

We meet and part;  
Our talk is all of heres and nows,  
Our conduct likewise; in no act  
Is any future, any past;  
Under our sly, unspoken pact,  
I know with whom I saw you last,  
But I say nothing; and you know  
At six-fifteen to whom I go.

Can even love be treated so?

I know, but I do not insist,  
Having stealth and tact, though not enough,  
What hour your eye is on your wrist.

No wild appeal, no mild rebuff  
Deflates the hour, leaves the wine flat.

Yet if you drop the picked-up book  
To intercept my clockward look—  
Tell me, can love go on like that?

Even the bored, insulted heart,  
That signed so long and tight a lease,  
Can break its contract, slump in peace.

V

I had not thought so tame a thing  
Could deal me this bold suffering.

I have loved badly, loved the great  
Too soon, withdrawn my words too late;  
And eaten in an echoing hall  
Alone and from a chipped plate  
The words that I withdrew too late.  
Yet even so, when I recall  
How ardently, ah! and to whom  
Such praise was given, I am not sad:  
The very rafters of this room  
Are honoured by the guests it had.

You only, being unworthy quite  
And specious,—never, as I think,  
Having noticed how the gentry drink  
Their poison, how administer  
Silence to those they would inter—  
Have brought me to dementia's brink.

Not that this blow be dealt to *me*:  
But by thick hands, and clumsily.

## VI

Leap now into this quiet grave.  
How cool it is. Can you endure  
Packed men and their hot rivalries—  
The plodding rich, the shiftless poor,  
The bold inept, the weak secure—  
Having smelt this grave, how cool it is?

Why, here's a house, why, here's a bed  
For every lust that drops its head  
In sleep, for vengeance gone to seed,  
For the slashed vein that will not bleed,  
The jibe unheard, the whip unfelt,  
The mind confused, the smooth pelt  
Of the breast, compassionate and brave.  
Pour them into this quiet grave.

## VII

Now from a stout and more imperious day  
Let dead impatience arm me for the act.  
We bear too much. Let the proud past gainsay  
This tolerance. Now, upon the sleepy pact  
That bound us two as lovers, now in the night  
And ebb of love, let me with stealth proceed,  
Catch the vow nodding, harden, feel no fright,  
Bring forth the weapon sleekly, do the deed.

I know—and having seen, shall not deny—  
This flag inverted keeps its colour still;  
This moon in wane and scooped against the sky  
Blazes in stern reproach. Stare back, my Will—  
We can out-gaze it; can do better yet:  
We can expunge it. I will not watch it set.

## VIII

The time of year ennobles you.  
The death of autumn draws you in.

The death of those delights I drew  
From such a cramped and troubled source  
Ennobles all, including you,  
Involves you as a matter of course.

You are not, you have never been  
(Nor did I ever hold you such),  
Between your banks, that all but touch,  
Fit subject for heroic song. . . .  
The busy stream not over-strong,  
The flood that any leaf could dam. . . .

Yet more than half of all I am  
Lies drowned in shallow water here:  
And you assume the time of year.

I do not say this love will last;  
Yet Time's perverse, eccentric power  
Has bound the hound and stag so fast  
That strange companions mount the tower  
Where Lockhart's fate with Keats is cast,  
And Booth with Lincoln shares the hour.

That which has quelled me, lives with me,  
Accomplice in catastrophe.

*Inert Perfection*

“Inert Perfection, let me chip your shell.  
You cannot break it through with that soft beak.  
What if you broke it never, and it befell  
You should not issue thence, should never speak?”

Perfection in the egg, a fluid thing,  
Grows solid in due course, and there exists;  
Knowing no urge to struggle forth and sing;  
Complete, though shell-bound. But the mind insists

It shall be hatched . . . to this ulterior end:  
That it be bound by Function, that it be  
Less than Perfection, having to expend  
Some force on a nostalgia to be free.

*Czecho-Slovakia*

If there were balm in Gilead, I would go  
To Gilead for your wounds, unhappy land,  
Gather you balsam there, and with this hand,  
Made deft by pity, cleanse and bind and sew  
And drench with healing, that your strength might grow,  
(Though love be outlawed, kindness contraband)  
And you, O proud and felled, again might stand;  
But where to look for balm, I do not know.  
The oils and herbs of mercy are so few;  
Honour's for sale; allegiance has its price;  
The barking of a fox has bought us all;  
We save our skins a craven hour or two.—  
While Peter warms him in the servants' hall  
The thorns are platted and the cock crows twice.

*Say that We Saw Spain Die*

Say that we saw Spain die. O splendid bull, how well you fought!  
Lost from the first.

. . . the tossed, the replaced, the  
watchful *torero* with gesture elegant and sly,  
Before the dark, the tiring but the unglazed eye deploying the  
bright cape,  
Which hid for once not air, but the enemy indeed, the authentic  
shape,  
A thousand of him, interminably into the ring released . . .  
the turning beast at length between converging colours  
caught.

Save for the weapons of its skull, a bull  
Unarmed, considering, weighing, charging  
Almost a world, itself without ally.

Say that we saw the shoulders more than the mind confused, so  
profusely  
Bleeding from so many more than the accustomed barbs, the  
game gone vulgar, the rules abused.

Say that we saw Spain die from loss of blood, a rustic reason, in  
a reinforced

And proud punctilious land, no *espada*—

A hundred men unhorsed,

A hundred horses gored, and the afternoon aging, and the crowd  
growing restless (all, all so much later than planned),

And the big head heavy, sliding forward in the sand, and the  
tongue dry with sand,—no *espada*

Toward that hot neck, for the delicate and final thrust, having  
dared trust forth his hand.

## *Underground System*

Set the foot down with distrust upon the crust of the world—it  
is thin.

Moles are at work beneath us ; they have tunnelled the sub-soil  
With separate chambers ; which at an appointed knock  
Could be as one, could intersect and interlock. We walk on the  
skin

Of life. No toil

Of rake or hoe, no lime, no phosphate, no rotation of crops, no  
irrigation of the land,

Will coax the limp and flattened grain to stand

On that bad day, or feed to strength the nibbled roots of our  
nation.

Ease has demoralized us, nearly so ; we know

Nothing of the rigours of winter : the house has a roof against—  
the car a top against—the snow.

All will be well, we say ; it is a habit, like the rising of the sun,  
For our country to prosper ; who can prevail against us ? No one.

The house has a roof; but the boards of its floor are rotting, and  
hall upon hall  
The moles have built their palace beneath us: we have not far to  
fall.

*Three Sonnets in Tetrameter*

I

See how these masses mill and swarm  
And troop and muster and assail:  
God!—We could keep this planet warm  
By friction, if the sun should fail.  
Mercury, Saturn, Venus, Mars:  
If no prow cuts your arid seas,  
Then in your weightless air no wars  
Explode with such catastrophes  
As rock our planet all but loose  
From its frayed mooring to the sun.  
Law will not sanction such abuse  
Forever; when the mischief's done,  
Planets, rejoice, on which at night  
Rains but the twelve-ton meteorite.

## II

His stalk the dark delphinium  
Unthorned into the tending hand  
Releases . . . yet that hour will come . . .  
And must, in such a spiny land.  
The silky powdery mignonette  
Before these gathering dews are gone  
May pierce me—does the rose regret  
The day she did her armour on?  
In that the foul supplants the fair,  
The coarse defeats the twice-refined,  
Is food for thought, but not despair:  
All will be easier when the mind  
To meet the brutal age has grown  
An iron cortex of its own.

### III

No further from me than my hand  
Is China that I loved so well;  
Love does not help to understand  
The logic of the bursting shell.  
Perfect in dream above me yet  
Shines the white cone of Fuji-San;  
I wake in fear, and weep and sweat . . .  
Weep for Yoshida, for Japan.  
Logic alone, all love laid by,  
Must calm this crazed and plunging star:  
Sorrowful news for such as I,  
Who hoped—with men just as they are,  
Sinful and loving—to secure  
A human peace that might endure.

## *Two Voices*

### FIRST VOICE

Let us be circumspect, surrounded as we are  
By every foe but one, and he from the woods watching.  
Let us be courteous, since we cannot be wise, guilty of no neglect,  
    pallid with seemly terror, yet regarding with indulgent eyes  
Violence, and compromise.

### SECOND VOICE

We shall learn nothing; or we shall learn it too late. Why should  
    we wait  
For Death, who knows the road so well? Need we sit hatching—  
Such quiet fowl as we, meek to the touch,—a clutch of adder's  
    eggs? Let us not turn them; let us not keep them warm;  
    let us leave our nests and flock and tell  
All that we know, all that we can piece together, of a time when  
    all went, or seemed to go, well.

*Mortal Flesh, Is Not Your Place in the Ground?*

Mortal flesh, is not your place in the ground?—Why do you  
stare so

At the bright planet serene in the clear green evening sky above  
the many-coloured streakèd clouds?—

Your brows drawn together as if to chide, your mouth set as if  
in anger.

Learn to love blackness while there is yet time, blackness  
Unpatterned, blackness without horizons.

Beautiful are the trees in autumn, the emerald pines  
Dark among the light-red leaves of the maple and the dark-red  
Leaves of the white oak and the indigo long  
Leaves of the white ash.

But why do you stand so, staring with stern face of ecstasy at the  
autumn leaves,

At the boughs hung with banners along the road as if a proces-  
sion were about to pass?

Learn to love roots instead, that soon above your head shall be  
as branches.

*No Earthly Enterprise*

No earthly enterprise  
Will cloud this vision; so beware,  
You whom I love, when you are weak, of seeking comfort stair  
by stair  
Up here: which leads nowhere.

I am at home—oh, I am safe in bed and well tucked in—Despair  
Put out the light beside my bed.  
I smiled, and closed my eyes.  
“Goodnight—goodnight,” she said.

But you, you do not like this frosty air.

Cold of the sun's eclipse,  
When cocks crow for the first time hopeless, and dogs in kennel  
howl,  
Abandoning the richly-stinking bone,  
And the star at the edge of the shamed and altered sun shivers  
alone,  
And over the pond the bat but not the swallow dips,  
And out comes the owl.

*Lines Written in Recapitulation*

I could not bring this splendid world nor any trading beast  
In charge of it, to defer, no, not to give ear, not in the least  
Appearance, to my handsome prophecies, which here I ponder  
and put by.

I am left simpler, less encumbered, by the consciousness that I  
shall by no pebble in my dirty sling avail  
To slay one purple giant four feet high and distribute arms  
among his tall attendants, who spit at his name when spit-  
ting on the ground:

They will be found one day  
Prone where they fell, or dead sitting—and a pockmarked wall  
Supporting the beautiful back straight as an oak before it is old.

I have learned to fail. And I have had my say.  
Yet shall I sing until my voice crack (this being my leisure, this  
my holiday)  
That man was a special thing and no commodity, a thing im-  
proper to be sold.

*This Dusky Faith*

Why, then, weep not,  
Since naught's to weep.

Too wild, too hot  
For a dead thing,  
Altered and cold,  
Are these long tears:  
Relinquishing  
To the sovereign force  
Of the pulling past  
What you cannot hold  
Is reason's course.

Wherefore, sleep.

Or sleep to the rocking  
Rather, of this:  
The silver knocking  
Of the moon's knuckles  
At the door of the night;

Death here becomes  
Being, nor truckles  
To the sun, assumes  
Light as its right.

So, too, this dusky faith  
In Man, transcends its death,  
Shines out, gains emphasis;  
Shorn of the tangled past,  
Shows its fine skull at last,  
Cold, lovely satellite.

*Truce for a Moment*

Truce for a moment between Earth and Ether  
Slackens the mind's allegiance to despair :  
Shyly confer earth, water, fire and air  
With the fifth essence.

For the duration, if the mind require it,  
Triggered is the wheel of Time against the slope ;  
Infinite Space lies curved within the scope  
Of the hand's cradle.

Thus between day and evening in the autumn,  
High in the west alone and burning bright,  
Venus has hung, the earliest riding-light  
In the calm harbour.

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# COLLECTED SONNETS

of Edna St. Vincent Millay

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of

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